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“Transfigured so Together”:
The Mythopoetics of Shakespeare’s Warrior Queens

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A Thesis in the Field of English
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

Shakespeare opens and closes his early comedy and late tragedy with Hippolyta and Cleopatra, the exotic and unruly matriarchal warrior queens who challenge conventional gender binaries, and control narrative power from the outset. They hold the male heroes hostage for sex, in the same way that men use women in the patriarchal system. However, despite critical views which would frame Shakespeare's women as, "defeated", or, "successfully contained", in their respective endings of marriage, and death, this reading argues that Shakespeare gives his queens full mythopoetic power to avoid inscriptive entrapment, and thereby choose their own stories. Their poetry also bears the memory of the original speech-act of creation which unites heaven and earth, and lifts their Amazon archetypes into the mythological allegory of Venus, and the spiritual realm of Hesiod's Gaia, Mother Nature, and the Christian Mother of God. Like the male heroes, Shakespeare's militant matriarchs receive visions of this Essential Female, and lay down their weapons of destruction, and take up creative roles to imitate Her. Thus, the queens give literary birth to their heroes, as immortal gods, and so transfigure their worlds, together, through metaphors of love.



Plate from *Die Tarocchi*. Zwei italienische Kupferstichfolgen aus dem XV. Jahrhundert (Cassirer, 1910: Berlin). Ascribed to the painter Mantegna.

Dedication

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Theoharis Constantine Theoharis for his careful guidance and patient instruction through all of my years of reading at Harvard. Chuck Houston and Mark Ouchida offered critical course advisement, and Dr. Talaya Delaney and Dr. Stephen Shoemaker launched the Thesis Proposal course which streamlined the early process for this paper. Reverend Dr. Stephanie Paulsell encouraged my focused study on religion in literature. Dr. Joyce Van Dyke taught me to listen for Shakespeare's lyric and to champion these queens as warriors. My beloved spiritual father, Bishop Hierotheos, Effie, and Gerondissas Photini, and Silouani, as well as Archimandrite Zacharias and the monastics in Essex, modeled earthly patience and heavenly victory as true exemplars of the mystical marriage. And Fr. George Dragas reflected that angelic state of love in, and for the world.

As carriers of the poetic muse, Tina Packer and Odds Bodkin gave voice to the cosmic force of the ancient, everyday, and eternal Female, in the dramatized myths, and emphasized the redemptive wisdom of respect for Her will. Professor Kimberley Patton and Dr. Bruce Beck inspired my efforts, along with Christina, and Rosemary, and Isabella, who embody Shakespeare's indomitable female power. My long-suffering grandmothers passed that bold, but stifled spirit to me, and my mother exhorted me to transform it to action. Marshall, Helen, and especially Maria, urged me to trust, focus, and find the courage to articulate it. My sculling partner, Will Reimann, listened to my ideas for thousands of river miles. Dr. Mark Hyman, Kristin Boyt, and my team at

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I could not have completed this task without each one of these inspirational teachers. I ask forgiveness for my failings, and pass on Shakespeare's universal message to all of our children and grandchildren: you can bring heaven to earth, and earth to heaven through the pious speech-acts of love in your heart.

Table of Contents

Dedication	v
Preface: An Antic Fable.....	ix
Introduction On Earth as it is in Heaven.....	1
Chapter 1 Background: The Bard Sings the Eternal Story	25
A Note on Amazons.....	28
Cleopatra as an Amazon	30
Literature Review.....	35
Research Methods.....	72
Limitations	74
Definition of Terms.....	75
Chapter 2 Battlefields: These Lovers Seek a Place to Fight.....	103
Hippolyta's First Scene.....	110
Hippolyta's Silence.....	128
Interpretive Choices for Hippolyta in Productions of <i>Midsummer</i>	132
Titania and Oberon	140
Cleopatra's First Scene	147
Chapter 3 Bower and Barge: Love's Paradox in the Womb/Tomb	176
Chapter 4 Monument and Mountaintop: The Queen's View from On High.....	193
Chapter 5 Such Tricks hath Strong Imagination: Tragical Mirth in Unlikely Weddings.....	217
Chapter 6 Eternally Knit: Speak Now, and Forever Hold your Peace.....	228
Simultaneous Dreams	236

Divine Speech Acts.....	245
Chapter 7 Immortal Longings: 'Til Death Do Us Part	259
Conclusion. Her Passion Ends the Play	303
Epilogue. Take Hands, All.....	315
Bibliography	332

Preface: An Antic Fable

Once upon a time, in the beginning, when the Poet of Heaven first named and located itself in its creation, order and chaos “turned together” in the “universal” dance of creation. And, ever since, opposites continually conjoin to reinscribe Love’s original speech-act, and thus, remember the beloved Creator in sacred texts, or love poetry. These ritual performances reenact the naturally rhythmic inbreathing, and outpouring, of the Logos, or soul of love, in the liminal spaces surrounding the mysteries of creation, birth, and death. This is the mystical and mortal domain of lunatic lovers, as poets of Nature.

As a fictional character, and a work of art, “made in the image and likeness” of the original uncreated artist, the poet’s eye apprehends visions of eternity in the lips and eyes of the beloved. The artist-lover recognizes the noble source of inspiration in the noble bringer of that joy, and yearns to return, repeatedly, to that secret space wherein the Poet of Heaven inscribes mortal members into the Book of Life and Remembrance. (Ps. 139:15; Ps. 56:9; Is. 4:3; Mal. 3:16; Ez. 9:2).¹ Seething and sweating, in a fine Dionysian frenzy,² the mortal poet’s “eye of the soul,” or “nous,” overjoys, and the eternal moment of ecstasy squeezes out through his pen.

¹ In Ez. 9:2, the poet describes a scene where one of the celestial envoys “had the scribe’s inkhorn upon his loins.” This imagery evokes the phallic “horn” of male authority which contains the “ink” of blood, water, and semen, with which the inspired poet engraves his paternal testimony, as law. Shakespeare used the word, “inkhorn” in *Henry VI* (3.1.1330; 4.2.2411), and *Much Ado* (5.4.1635), in contexts that support this interpretation of the metaphor. I will add the symbols of pen and tongue, as similar instruments for writing. Also, as the Book of Life contains death and deathlessness, I will include swords, worms, crocodiles, and the ancient immortal serpent to the phallic imagery of the poet’s inkhorn.

² Harold Brooks points out an important ironic inconsistency in Theseus’s speech. Like Antony’s exasperation over Cleopatra’s antagonism. Puttenham describes it as, “some divine instinct, the Platonicks call it *furor*” (3; Plato *Phaedrus* 245, 249 “madness or inspiration in poets and lovers”; *Ion* 533, 534;

For the rest of his works and days, he labors through the liturgical cycle, straining to recall that sacred stillpoint of divine communion, before time began, before the erotic violence, separation, and exile to earthly birth. As the Bride of Christ, his litanies long for “nostos,” or “homecoming,” in everlasting reunion with the Bridegroom after death. Thus, the poet prays, repeatedly, for peace in the world, and life in the age to come.

Aristotle, *Poetics* ch. 17). In this memorable passage, Theseus tries to degrade the poets for making something out of “airy nothing” which ironically serves to clearly describe the most unique attribute of the divine creator of the universe. Thus, Theseus’s railing against the folly of imagination doubles as an affirmation of the poet’s divine creative power. But Brooks asserts that “A significance beyond the immediate occasion is even more plainly heard in Hippolyta’s lines on the lovers’ story” which directly refute Theseus’s dismissal of imagination (Brooks cxiii). Hippolyta immediately counters Theseus’ “skepticism.” She finds it strange, but does not indulge his dismissal of the lover’s fantasy as “airy nothing.” Brooks asks: “What fitter praise can be found for it than Hippolyta’s: “Strange and to be wondered at, it grows to something of great constancy” (cxiii). Shakespeare confirms Hippolyta’s imaginative reasoning when he brings the fairies back to perform the highest blessing on the mortals—to bless Theseus’ marriage, in Theseus’ own palace. And, similarly, Cleopatra ends her life as Antony’s, “marble-constant” wife in eternity.

Introduction

On Earth as it is in Heaven

Mythology is to literature as flowers are to wallpaper. In a single, repeating pattern of divine creation with human participation, mythology's most ancient emblems reflect Mother Nature's sovereignty in the story of human culture. And so, the feminine force orders chaos in mythopoesis: or, the marriage of opposites. Thus, the poet of Love, or the Essential Female, brings the heavenly Word of Love to earth, in the form of the comic hero—the god-man—and thereby “civilizes” tragic death. In this verb, the Oxford English Dictionary specifies the feminine effect of her creation, and union, with the male, as something like transfiguration: “to bring to an advanced state of social and cultural enlightenment.” This gendered cosmic power finds expression in the masculine struggle for feminine narrative power within and between both sexes.

In “Stories of the Night,” Louis Montrose situates the female body as “the locus for the contestation of authority” (“Stories” 128). And so, it makes sense that the “have-nots” would try to seize control of those who “have” the power to bring forth the transfigured word of love, in lawful marriage, and thus, rule the wife as a paradoxically “superior inferior” (Montrose “Discord” 116). Thus, the battle between the sexes informs the particular tones and motifs in each version of the eternally constant, universal design. In this way, Shakespeare's matriarchal warrior queens'

aggressive hostility toward the patriarchal powers who overbear female choice both mirrors and challenges contemporary sexual politics.

The eye of Shakespeare's poet "doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven," in order to "apprehend some joy," and "some bringer of that joy" (5.1.19-20).³ In this action, the playwright passes the mythopoetic power to "body forth" divine joy on earth to his warrior queens, as figures of the Great Mother Nature, or the Christian god-bearer. Northrop Frye situates this speech-act in "cosmology" as "one of the oldest of the literary arts" (*Fables* 52), and George Steiner explains how language calls us to reach back through the "incessant echo" to the voice of the Creator, "which bodied forth the original Logos" (*Babel* 60), and relocates "the lost cosmic syllable" (72). Thus, the vertical movement between the original, heavenly text and the modern, earthly translation, also connects people, horizontally, across the ages, through the synchronic strangeness and presence in the source.

Shakespeare translates that cross-shaped, therapeutic paradox of love into Hippolyta's "strange and admirable" (5.1.27) story of the night and her marriage in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Cleopatra's "strange and terrible" death (4.15.3) in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as a figure for mortal and mystical marriage (Is. 62:4). Theseus, Shakespeare's patriarchal authority, presents his union with Hippolyta as: "the sealing-day betwixt my love and me / For an everlasting bond of fellowship" (1.1.84-5). Paul Olson offers a similar Christian Romantic argument around this definition. He holds that the movement of erotic love is mystical poetry: "religious and philosophic art" which "reaches near to the sacred," and "beyond a common joy

³ All Shakespeare references are from the Oxford editions.

toward the mind of God” (*Beyond* xi). Shakespeare performs this task by “employing extended intertextual elements from classical myth and biblical scriptures to give the action a numinous profundity” (xii).⁴ Steiner also points to Shakespeare’s mythopoetic “alchemy,” or “translation” of the Logos, as “a master and innovator of a new idiom” (*Babel* 67). As a poet, he creates a third reality from the original language in relation to this “strange” earthly world. These observations suggest that the plays revise, or “look back,” to the Bible, pagan folklore, and ancient mythology for essential truth, to re-hear the story.

However, in his pre- and post-WWII views on both plays, Jan Kott insists that Shakespeare intends neither moral judgment *nor* meaning. Despite this “local” issue, Martin Esslin’s introduction to Kott’s *Shakespeare our Contemporary* opens with Kott’s wider agreement: “Great works of art have an autonomous existence, independent of the intention and personality of their creators and independent also of the circumstances of the time of their creation, that is the mark of their greatness. Only the Bible rivals Shakespeare in archetypal significance” (Kott, xi-xii). Esslin explains that Kott’s Polish, existentialist criticism carries weight because, in the crucible of his time: “Only in great art could people find the strength and consolation that must spring from a sense of communion with kindred spirits.” He fought for “a return to truth, or a restoration of respect towards non-theological, unfettered reason” (xvii). Here, even this atheistic lens recognizes the universal truths carried forward in Shakespeare’s mythical allegories. And, Kott seems to especially admire

⁴ The play’s thirty-nine classical allusions (Root 130) enhance the sense of the lovers as larger-than-life, “the stuff of myth itself” (J. Hall 28).

Shakespeare's nonpartisan viewpoint: "It is one of the roots of Shakespeare's universality that his work seems totally free of any definite ideological position" (*Shakespeare* xviii).

So, although Shakespeare's cynical views stand out against Early Modern Christian beliefs around transcendence of the tragic cycle, Kott's critical respect affirms Shakespeare's characters as part of the eternal process of language and myth. The difference is that his Marxist beliefs insist that the language does nothing more than turn: "A stark, violent, and relentless process, totally free of any vulgar teleological conception, a great wheel of power, endlessly revolving" (xix). From this perspective, there is no end goal toward which the life story-cycle moves, such as a heavenly reunion with the creator, or even hope of peaceful relationships on earth (similar to the Theatre of the Absurd). So, Kott's main metaphor for both plays revolves around Shakespeare's theme of boying, as sexual humiliation.

On the other hand, modern feminist, Janet Adelman, argues that myths, such as Venus and Mars, do "provide context" for Early Modern Christians in England: "to identify those images which the original audience might have found significant, and to suggest a wide human-to-cosmic range of signification" (*Liar* 100). Frank Kermode concurs: "an obvious place to talk about the origins of the universe would be in the discussion of love, since without the agency represented by Venus there would be no eduction of forms from the prime matter" (*Sense* 75-6). And so, despite his opposite outlook on meaning, "Kott's vision of the contemporary in the eternal, is to be able to hold up the immortal plays as mirrors for his own time," and thus, affirms Jonson's famous elegy, that Shakespeare's work is "...for all time" (xxi).

These critics demonstrate that Shakespeare's genius merits the broadest range of interpretive voices whose "musical confusion" converges, to "seem all one mutual cry" (*MND* 4.1.114-18), in harmony with Steiner's "incessant echo" of the universal song.

According to Steiner, in the original speech-act of creation, the Poet of Heaven spoke the universe into being with one word: Love (*Babel* 67). In that event of mythopoeia, or fusion of the divine Word with the material world, the cosmic artisan conjoins limbs, and inspires life into all of nature in his eternal Love-poem. In 1595, and 1606, respectively, William Shakespeare, "The Poet of Love" (Bryant 174), recorded his visions of that eternal moment of creation in his early comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and his late tragedy, *Antony and Cleopatra*. He performs his pious duty as an inkhorned scribe, or recording-angel, in these ritual speech-offerings of duty and desire for his beloved audience who "make" or "create" him as a playwright. Thus, as a divinely inspired poem, or figure of speech, himself, Shakespeare retells the love story through the poetic eyes of Hippolyta and Cleopatra. Through them, the playwright demonstrates each person as a poet and a poem, a work of art, a fictional character, and a figure of speech, "made in the image and likeness" (Gen. 1:26)⁵ of the original creator.

Shakespeare further characterizes his queens as archetypal female warrior reflections of each other, and of that immortal and androgynous force of creation—the Essential Female. As ancient mythical matriarchs, these women use their sharp tongues as swords, and pens, to rearticulate female freedom and power following

⁵ See also Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15; James 3:9.

possible visions of themselves in the role of the submissive wife and life-giving mother. And, like Venus, the goddess of Love, the queens' blinding beauty might change the rulers who then change the ruling myths, from tragedy to comedy. Similarly, the queens might reconfigure their own stories to reflect the image of the Great Mother, as god-bearers, within the sacred rite of communion in marriage, despite the exploited look of trapped Amazon Others, or exotic foreign curiosities, exploited by their male captors.

When Hippolyta opens the final act, Theseus dismisses the lovers' reports as, "separate cock-and-bull stories", casting out all disturbing phenomena under the triple heading of lunacy, poetry, and love" (Girard *Violence* 35). This neat operation, "frees respectable men of all responsibility for whatever tricks, past, present, and future, their own desires and mimetic violence might play on them" (33). This protects the Duke's patriarchal comfort zone, and he describes exactly how imagination functions, in poetry:

More strange than true. I never may believe
 These antic fables, nor these fairy toys.../
 The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
 Are of imagination all compact.../
 The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
 And as imagination bodies forth
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
 A local habitation and a name.
 Such tricks hath strong imagination... (5.1.2-3, 7-8, 12-18)

In *Shakespeare the Thinker*, Nuttall states that "everyone knows Duke Theseus' speech on imagination" but asserts, "It is important to listen when women are talking, but it is hard to do when the men are making so much noise." (121). One of Shakespeare's important jokes is that Plutarch calls Theseus a "fabulous antiquity"

(*Theseus* 1.3; North 1:29). Yet, Shakespeare's Theseus scoffs at "antic fables." The gods are simply old-fashioned stories or "fairy toys." This attitude hints at a radical feminist's view of the patriarchal weight of authority, in the mathematical, linguistic, botanical, and musical sense of "returning to the root" of divine creation in the feminine force of Mother Nature. However, Shakespeare still assigns the most distinguished male authority figure the most memorable phrases.

For this reason, most pay no attention to Hippolyta's quiet words which reveal that "her concern is of an entirely different sort," which holds "immense significance" (Girard *Myth* 33). Bryant notes that although Hippolyta's response is "almost never cited," it is she who "advances the basis for accepting the story" (2). And Shakespeare makes Hippolyta's well-reasoned "correction" of Theseus's conventional flourish "as discreet and unobtrusive as it is illuminating" (Frye *Imagination* 36). This scene offers an essential view of the role of poetic imagination, which both queens use to defend narrative power and effect change in the battle between reason and passion:

But the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images,
And grows to something of great constancy:
But howsoever, strange and admirable" (*MND* 5.1.23-27)

Girard suggests that Hippolyta "clearly perceives Theseus' failure to come up with a necessary holistic interpretation," as "he and his innumerable followers—the immense majority—want nothing more than to pass off myth as, 'airy nothings,' or objects of amusement" (*Myth* 35). Mark Stavig clarifies that, when Theseus's speaks of "the forms of things unknown," he means "the feminine dimension of the natural

order,” effectively dismissing the queen, herself, as a function of “imagination,” along with her poetic apprehension of their universal connection (270). But Girard insists:

Although the critical debate seems one-sided in the Duke’s favor, how could we fail to realize that the real last word belongs to Hippolyta, both literally and figuratively? How could we doubt that her words represent Shakespeare’s own view of how the play really hangs together?” When I suggest that *Midsummer*, behind all the frills, is a serious genetic theory of myth, I am only translating Hippolyta’s five lines into common parlance. It is not I, but Shakespeare, who draws our attention to *all their minds transfigured so together*, and to the final result as *something of great constancy*, in other words, a common structure of mythical meaning. (*Myth* 34-35)

Frye widens the scope: “All themes and characters and stories that you encounter in literature belong to one big interlocking family—‘literature as a whole’” (*Imagination* 49). Hippolyta’s speech unites the particular experiences of the lovers in a universal story of transfiguration. Similarly, Cleopatra describes her parallel vision of physical love with Antony as a religious experience: “Eternity was in our lips and eyes” (1.3.35). In this sexual convergence, or “upwelling of air” (spirit) and “downwelling of water” (bodies), the queens’ common story raises the poet’s eyes and lips from earth to heaven, in the hope of earthly and eternal peace. And, at the same time, the Great Mother literally and figuratively “civilizes” the hero, or brings the heavenly spirit to earth, in a body.

In this mythopoetic process, the poet mimics Steiner’s and the Bible’s divine impulse: to inscribe the Logos as “nous” or “eye of the soul,” onto the pages of the human heart, and thereby inspire every living human body into literal and figurative “being.” Poets like William Shakespeare arrange and impress letters or characters on paper pages to form humanized versions of contrary forces of nature, such as Venus

and Mars, in order to reenact the embattled story of creation. “He makes them seem real by localizing and particularizing them” in places and names (Blits *Soul* 166). In his definition of mythopoetics, Theseus’s syntax ironically admits that the poet’s imagination “apprehends” and is empowered to “bod[y] forth” “ayery nothing” or “forms of things unknowne” from heaven, and then “bequeaths to this Form a “locall habitation, and a name” that we might comprehend something of the eternal in the local story.

In short, the poets are more rational than irrational lovers and madmen, and “it is the artist’s duty to incarnate the universal in a concrete visual emblem,”⁶ or Frye’s eternal story (Olson *Beyond* 97). Here, the playwright ascribes these fictional characters with “dramatis personae” or “the voice behind the mask.” From this position, actors, or “hypocrites,” or those “below judgment,” speak out and pretend to become credible new versions of immortal heroes, like “some squeaking Cleopatra” (*Ant.* 5.2.220), or the “rattling tongue[s]” of the “great clerks” (*MND* 5.1.102, 93). Therefore, the mythopoetic language of the “trauma,” in the “drama” or “dream” of sexual love, amends the natural contrarities of erotic violence between masculine tearing and feminine conjunction, and collapses the present mortal struggle back into the eternal moment of creation.

Cleopatra’s revelation of herself, played badly, draws all metadramatic eyes to her character as the allegorical goddess. The moment stops time, and lifts the hearers out of their mortal bodies, seats, costumes, and personae, to meet the eternal gaze. G. Wilson Knight explains how the confusion in *Midsummer* is divinely “spangled, or

⁶ For more on this Neo-Platonic thought, see Gombrich 180; cf. *passim* 163-192.

shot, with light” (*Comedies*, 151).⁷ The stunning experience of unconscious and often blinding instinct marks a moment of unification which contains the original life force in its stillpoint moment of creation (Markels 4). The everyday chronos disappears into everlasting kairos. Time is no more, and the effect approaches “consubstantiality” with all who have gone before and will be, as Erich Neumann asserts (*Origins* 289). Goddard observes: “This imagery offers an immediate conscious apprehension of an invisible world, or a transubstantiation of the world of sense into something beyond itself” (*Vol I* 80). The man returns home to the protective womb and “changes substance,” as in the mythopoetical action of the poet’s raised eyes and lips. Thus, the sexual act in marriage renders both partners “feminine” in creating a third, new reality.

This sacred speech-act figures the Mother of God’s holy communion, or “the transubstantiation rite,” which “literally bodies forth a coming of Christ which is past, present, and future all in one” (Dodd 8). In this prayer-poem, the warrior queens stop “boying,” or masculinizing, their greatness and recover the original feminine root word they had lost. Shakespeare demonstrates their “palpable-gross play” and hilarious humanity as hopping, fighting, and yawning women, but their surprising marriages seem to speak their dreams (*Ant.* 5.1.358). Chesterton views their mature love as “higher than personal ends” which haul everyone up out of Nilus’ slime (15). They “girl” their greatness. In this moment, the queen’s poetry overlays the historical Cleopatra with the boy actor, as a contemporary unit of signification, with all their

⁷ In contrast to Brandes, Chesterton, Kott, and G. Wilson Knight, among others, Thomas Parrott (1949) sees only light charm in the play, “devoid of the shadow of death or danger” (133) and attributes that to Shakespeare’s masterful use of language (131).

differences intact, and yet all the distance between them is erased. This strong trick of imagination demonstrates exactly how encounters with Amazons melds contrarities.

In this phenomenon, the women appear “symbolically central,” rather than “socially peripheral,” as they are treated by society (Eggert 139). Both queens apprehend “strange and admirable” and “strange and terrible” dream-visions, or “stories of the night.” Shakespeare not only unites the two queens across the canon, in Girard’s horizontal, earthly view as “strange” or “Foreign Other”, but also dramatizes how the poet’s own eye might also be vertically transfigured. In this act of creation, the pen might relocate and rename both sexes’ masculinized characteristics to their original shape, as divine androgynous figures of speech. In the queens’ choices of endings in marriage, Shakespeare literally and figuratively rebalances the masculine within the feminine, and thereby re-enacts the mythopoetic fusion of heaven and earth in the original Female.

Frye summarizes this inscriptive power: “The imaginative or creative force in the mind is what has produced everything that we call culture and civilization. It is the power of transforming a sub- or super-human physical world into a world with a human shape and meaning” (*Fables* 152). Ritual, myth, and folktale are all part of pre-literature categories, to which profound masterpieces refer, and they seem to draw us to a high vantage point from which we can see an enormous number of converging patterns of significance: “literature is a reconstructed mythology—a total body of verbal creation” (Frye *Fables* 37-38). Frye contends: “the critic needs to acknowledge the source material for the work as a way to identify the archetypes, and thus, draw closer to the form which Shakespeare recreated” (*Fables* 13). In 750 BCE, the Greek

poet Hesiod named this cosmic, god-bearing power “Gaia.” Monastic theologian Hierotheos Vlachos asserts that the Bible calls it, “theotokos” or “god bearer”—the “Mother of God” (Vlachos 31). Montagu ascribes civilization to the Essential Female; Neumann to the Great Mother (1995), the First Prophetess, and Sovereign Creatrix (Neumann *Fear* 204).

Using the art of mythopoetics, Shakespeare’s queens might employ their divinely inscribed feminine powers to similarly imagine and amend tragic mutability and thereby create permanent peace. Dr. Ashley Montagu champions that memory of the female power to conjoin, as the natural civilizer of the masculine urge to tear apart. Shakespeare overlays both plays with the example of how Hercules’s legendary rage was transfigured through humble female service to the Lydian warrior Queen, “Omphale,” or “the navel of the universe.” Swearingen explains that this maternal matrix gave birth to Herakles, of legendary strength, “from beneath the earth,” figuring Shakespeare’s bower or barge, womb, and tomb, creation imagery. There, he learned conjunctive womanly arts, like spinning and weaving, “in order to reemerge *stronger* into the world of men” (43).⁸ This imagery might also figure the Old Testament world-destroyer who emerges from his mother’s womb, and from the underground tomb after similar humble self-sacrifice. He is transfigured through the maternal force, as the New Testament Christ, or Word of Love.

⁸ Swearingen notes another vestigial “trace” of the pre-Olympian love as identifiably female to the Danaids, who identify as a type of Amazon tribe that “rejected marriage and patrimony,” and claimed, ‘Our Great Mother’ alone as progenetrix” (Swearingen 40; Aeschylus 141) *The Suppliants* “exist” as immortal allegories recorded by Aeschylus’ apprehension of the sacred female. See also Kintz 116-18 and Wolf 269.

According to Plutarch and Ovid, both of Shakespeare's heroes are related to Hercules, and named for historical and mythical tyrants. In his use of this theme, along with that of Cleopatra's eunuch's reflections on "what Venus did with Mars" (1.5.18), Shakespeare suggests that the feminine force of Love has already transfigured the males, together, from self-serving monsters to self-sacrificing lovers. This classical version of the creation story models the way that the Word of Love conjoins Shakespeare's mortals from Old Testament to New Testament authorities. Like the Mother of God in the Annunciation—and Christ's incarnation, transfiguration, crucifixion, and resurrection—Shakespeare's mortals demonstrate that Love requires them to sacrifice themselves for their neighbor. Thus, the civilizing memory of the female force of Christ revises the furious Father-God of the Hebrew Bible to a new testament of love.

Janet Adelman extends this correlation in her analysis of how Shakespeare overlays yet another classical parallel onto his characters as archetypes of Love and Death in the cosmic battle of the sexes, when he similarly inverts the gender roles to accredit female power in the fable of Venus. Frank Kermode identifies that same force as a reflection of the divine Poet of Heaven. He posits that the New Testament marriage, in Revelation, reconciles the Old Testament tragic divorce, in Genesis, with a more permanent sense of an ending in eternal bliss, with humanity as the Bride of Christ. From the Greek theologians, in reference to the book of Revelation, Kermode explains *chronos* as the "waiting" or "passing" time which "will be no more," but *kairos* as the "significant season," "charged with meaning derived from its relation to the end." (*Sense* 47) Thus, "in the same way that Christ rewrote the End of time, and

thereby changes all, so kairoi mark historical moments of intemporal significance.

The divine plot is the pattern of kairoi in relation to the End” (47).⁹ This poetic process smooths the actual edges of human weakness and imperfection into the larger, heroic ideal of the Christian story.

Kermode explains that this scientific process of quantum poetics “relates events that appear to be discrete and humanly inexplicable to an acceptable human pattern. A single mathematical formulism links waves and particles, which is only partially true for each, separately. This Principle of Complementarity reconciles theoretical prediction and empirical observation into congruence” (*Sense* 60). The new concord makes it necessary to deal with uncertainty—like Hippolyta’s story of the night and Cleopatra’s dream of Antony—as if it were a discrete truth of the world and part of the nature of things, rather than an imaginary fantasy. However, Kermode clarifies that “in classical physics, uncertainty is an epistemological issue, not part of the nature of things. Both classical and quantum physics are alike human responses to nature, and comparable to different styles of art” which express an “interplay between the world and ourselves. The ‘either-or’ answer is rejected, and, seen together, the past is included as complementary with the present” (*Sense* 60-61). Reason meets imagination; art meets reality. The mind reimagines the old story in new artificial reality, or fiction. This is what Hippolyta’s poetry accomplishes in her reply, and marriage, to Theseus. And Cleopatra’s poetry, similarly, speaks Antony’s death into a common truth for both of them.

⁹ “The time is accomplished...” (Mark 1:15)

Extending Kermode's significant reading, I will show how the queens' speech-acts might demonstrate mythopoetic action as their masculine warrior-natures first figure, Eve. She separates mankind from God, in death, and then textually transfigures to Mary, who cooperates by bearing the redemptive Word of Love into the world through her body. Faced with similar opportunities to consent to the divine female in their mortal bodies, the warrior queens' speech-acts of Love might resolve the sexual power struggle and political crisis, and contain themselves, of their own free wills, in similar mystical marriages. In this reading, the rebellious queens might end their plays as pious, and independent, god-bearing women, who voluntarily marry their Lords and bear them as savior-sons, in the image of the heroic ideal of Love itself. Or they might simply remain old, "androktons" or "male-killers" (Herodotus 4.110.1). I will examine the text for clues evidencing both readings for both queens, and then compare the findings.

Adelman further asserts that, as *Venus Victrix*, the warrior queens embody the paradox of love, and demonstrate the ineffable, ineluctable, and inscrutable truth of the original Word of creation. As matriarchal Amazon warriors, they use men as sexual accessories to augment their power, as patriarchs use women. This framing power reasserts female narrative power over their bodies, and therefore, their endings. The queens also demonstrate the ambiguity of the mythical, magical, ancient immortal pagan serpent, and thus, represent the infinite variety of Montagu's Essential Female, or Neumann's Great Mother, as paradoxically ancient, changeable, and everlasting.¹⁰ Jonson's "quibble" describes the symbolic female who is both

¹⁰ See also Linda Charnes, for more on Cleopatra's source of strength in changeability (*Notorious* 147).

irresistible and dangerous, and Robert Graves names this figure *The White Goddess*.¹¹

In this redemptive female figure, Robert Graves asserts, “There is one story, and one story only”, but “that story strays into common stories, full of young gods and heroes, such as Theseus and Hercules, in Greek myth” (qtd. in Frye *Imagination* 51).¹²

On this theme of original and “wholly other,” Kathryn Schwarz’s “Amazon encounter” explains how the necessity of death drives the power struggle in which both sexes identify as masculine warrior-males who fight until Love naturally dissolves the gender-differentials of the foreign threat of Other in the salvific death of erotic union—the literal act of mythopoesis. In fact, A. D. Nuttall asserts that Shakespeare shares with Marlowe the prize for freeing Ovid from the moralizing commentary which had encrusted his writings by the end of the sixteenth century: “‘It’s really all about sex!’ they joyously point out” (*Action* 213).¹³ Kermode overlays the theme with a wider perspective: “Time rules over man, and it is disastrous that sexual bliss is not immortal, only the agent of a limited immortality, *athanasia*, or deathlessness” (*Sense* 77). Holloway cheerfully summarizes that Shakespeare emphasizes human satisfaction as, “nothing short of a ‘heaven’” (Holloway 100). This means that he glimpses the infinite good through his passion.

So, both *Midsummer* and *Antony* depict the long literary history of this cosmic conflict which resolves in the “apocalypsos,” or “unveiling” of the bride in the book

¹¹ Or “Leucothea,” the ancient sea goddess who overrode Poseidon’s power, and saved Odysseus from drowning.

¹² “The poet seeks the new expression, not the new content. And when we find profound thoughts such as, ‘The course of true love never did run smooth.’ (1. 1. 134) we are usually finding a statement of a common human situation wittily or inevitably expressed.” Such comments as that one are “part of the convention at least since Menander, whose stock of them was raided by St. Paul, and later, Shakespeare” (Frye *Fables*, 56)

¹³ See also Granville-Barker, *Foreword* to Vol 3; J. L. Hall 92; Goldman 113; and Colie 186-7.

of Revelation. For example, we will hear Theseus warn Hippolyta to keep silent, and perform her sexual duty to him as one of his “great clerks,” using the same dynamics of shame and coercion that Oberon uses to silence Titania’s rebellion. But then, Hippolyta, as the Fairy Queen, silences her dream-lover, and magically constrains him for her own private sexual usage. Thus, Hippolyta might naturally bewitch Theseus and “purge [his] mortal grossness,” as Titania promises in her seduction of Bottom (3.1.151). Titania silences her lover. Thus, Hippolyta’s vision of heavenly love might make the tyrant, Theseus, a heroic lover by transforming the noisy competitor in both of them. Cleopatra, who can “make defect perfection” (2.2.238), similarly “beguiled” Antony (4.12.28), then mirrors his humble, feminine action of voluntary self-sacrifice; and marries him in death.

In another parallel theme, both Antony and Cleopatra fear being “boyed,” or displayed as defeated, in the final narrative. Here, Shakespeare forces the reader to pause and take note of his inventive use of this noun, as a verb, for the purpose of belittling and representing a character as “less than a man.” Shakespeare seems to know that this battle for power revolves like Kott’s wheel of Fortune, in the lovers’ jealous bickering. This cycle continues in both plays until the female force stops retaliating and suffers a transfiguring Love-Death experience which saves the hero and society. In this spirit of humility, Antony begs Cleopatra to make his memory eternal in the universal “chronicle” (3.13.176). Queen Hippolyta’s spare words of poetry, and decision to wed Theseus, weaves them all into that ancient love story: to “eternally be knit” (4.1.180) and “transfigured so together.” Thus, Shakespeare

accords the women free-will choice, and actual power to civilize and deify their men in the final narrative.

In 2010, Christy Desmet's essay seats this female power in another familiar allegorical Amazonian figure—*Madame Rhetorica*. She asserts, "The power of rhetoric to disfigure or transfigure both individual and culture is the subject of this play" (300). This claim challenges the conventional gender binaries of male duty and female desire which suggests that the queens' choices prove as reasonable as their heroes prove passionate. By portraying the queens in this specific androgynous persona, Shakespeare simplifies that conflict in the peaceful, but paradoxical resolution of everchanging and constant love. Although tragic confusion threatens, and the curtain might simply come down on another patriarchal triumph of female containment and control in the final narrative history, comic iterations might also find that enemies "take hands" in a reading of the queens' rhetoric where love is the universal and invariable constant. (4.1.84)

Hippolyta's vision of the moon's new-bent bow in the clouds might indicate a change in her Amazon weapon of death to Cupid's bow of love, and inspire her to accept marriage with Theseus, her sexual hero. And it may be that Cleopatra's vision of eternity during sex with Antony, on her barge, might transform her aggressive ambitions from ruling this world, to life after death as his uncontested wife: the goddess-queen of heaven. However, these themes are suspiciously simplistic for a Shakespearean plot, and the fact that he opens with irritable and sexually uncooperative *warriors* indicates a more complex thematic aim, or battle. It seems more likely, then, that these matriarchal queens continue to fight to retain their

authority against patriarchal rule until some power beyond reason strikes an unexpected change. Through these women, Shakespeare displays the intuitive power of the Essential Female, who “more witnesseth than fancy’s images” (5.1.25), and eventually turn war to love; discord to concord; tearing to conjoining; Mars to Venus; Hercules to Omphale. Still further, she might transfigure the Old Testament, patriarchal Law of Death, in Eve, to the New Testament Word of Love, in Mary. Following this universal theme of transfiguration, my thesis will focus on the queens’ mythopoetic speech-acts, which demonstrate the power of Love’s vision to civilize, tame, or transform the gender binaries, *in both sexes*, from aggressive masculine tyrants to receptive feminine lovers.

For instance, I will explore Cleopatra’s opening scene, which reveals her as the love-goddess who requires Antony’s full sacrifice. However, she importantly characterizes his jealous rages against her power, as Venus, to destroy him, in monsters of both sexes: “One way a Gorgon / the other way’s a Mars” (2.5.117-8). She is represented in a similarly murderous state after Antony’s marriage to Octavia. He tries to fight back—“The witch shall die”—but her kiss “robs” him of his sword-power, “repays” her debt, and he dies for her, as his goddess (4.8.47). He even finds gratitude: “My queen and Eros / Have by their brave instruction got upon me / A nobleness in record” (5.15.97-9). As Eros, or his queen of Love, she “civilizes” him and thus makes him a “noble” hero for the “record.” This level of spiritual illumination only comes after Love’s divine “lightning” (1.1.145). Cleopatra also acts like a fire-breathing dragon, “Serpent of the Nile” (1.5.25), but also as a “day o’ th’ world” (4.8.12-3). Either way, or in both ways at once, she ultimately offers her body

as a spiritual sacrifice, like incense of “fire and air” (5.2.288), to complete their heroic “record” in heaven as a married couple.

Love’s feminizing power works similarly through Hippolyta, as Theseus claims he will wed her in “another key” rather than through coercion: “doing [her] injuries” (1.1.17-8). And yet, in the next scene, the Duke, frustrated by his lack of control over the powerful creative desires of the female, condemns the willful Hermia at the same time, and for the same reason that Oberon curses his Fairy Queen. The Queen of Nature exposes his patriarchal behavior as “the forgeries of jealousy,” as feminists argue against all gender constructs. (2.1. 81) At the same moment, with compassion and desire to reconcile, and “rock the ground”, when his Queen compels Oberon to lift the curse, Theseus also lifts his own law, in an identical attempt to appease his goddess and revise the impending tragedy to comic marriage. In this action, the word of Love might transfigure Hippolyta, herself, from the role of vicious Amazon threat to state security, in attacks on the male, to the constant wife, like Cleopatra. So, as Christ disarms masculine death in both sexes, the eternal story resolves in creative weddings at the ends of both plays, to reflect the eternal wedding feast in heaven.

There is also a reading of both queens which does not include divine visions. In this analysis, Shakespeare’s warrior queens make fully rational choices that marshal their passionate rage and fears: choosing endings in marriages that appear as conciliatory defaults, but actually imagine a higher victory for the body politic. Here, they might revise their personal stories as practical, militant victors, rather than glorious, church-triumphant victors or downtrodden political victims. That rational

action is as critical to the masculine warrior-ruler who risks all for duty, which is also inherent in the creative and violent birthing process of the female who risks all to bear her hero. Here, these double-gendered warrior-type actions might exhibit the lowest survival instincts as well as the highest morally deliberate and level-headed choices for peace. Regardless of motive, the mythopoetical “tragical mirth” (5.1.57) of both queens’ endings demonstrate Love’s paradoxical and ambivalent passion of love and death, in the image of Gaia, the Great Earth or Mother Nature, the eternal uroboros, the allegory of Love, discordia concors, Cupid/Harmony, the White Goddess, Venus Victrix, Madame Rhetorica, and the Mother of God, in Christ, the Logos, and divine Word of Love, and Poet of Heaven.

Because Shakespeare specifically names these queens as warriors, who will “eternally be knit” into marriages with male heroes who might be similarly “transfigured,” it seems most plausible to view all of the previously-mentioned archetypes of the Essential Female through Shakespeare’s early modern focus on his Christian audience, “steeped in the New Testament” (Kermode *Sense* 4). Thus, my expected conclusion is that the warrior queens apprehend visions of their female souls through Mary, the new Eve, who transfigures the Old Law of death by agreeing to bear the New Testament Word of Love. Her “Yes,” or “Be it done unto me according to Thy Word” (Luke 1:26), translates tragedy to a comic resolution in earthly and heavenly marriage. Incidentally, both Joseph and her son, Christ, repeat the same humble words when asked to sacrifice their wills for their betrothed (Matt.1:21, 3:15). Through this mythopoetic action of extreme humility, both sexes are free to reconcile their masculine warrior-natures with feminine peace and rediscover their desire to

worship the heroic mortal and divine bridegroom, as an earthly and heavenly bride and Mother of God.

According to Mark Stavig, the biological cycle requires male domination and female submission, and it follows that any resistance against that ancient law will cause conflict and ultimately fail (45). Peter Saccio asserts that that natural order is traditionally gendered in the political conflict between masculine authority and feminine choice (*Word Part 1* 32-3). I will argue that, while both plays demonstrate tension between inconstant passion and orderly reason, that common human story represents a cosmic power struggle within each embodied soul and must not be confined within gender-specific binary laws constructed for *either* sex's political convenience. The militant matriarchs are no less to blame for the confusion than the bullying patriarchs. At first glance, the plots seem to combine these critical views of nature and politics to affirm that the political order of male authority over women naturally reflects the creator's biological order, as it does in the traditional Biblical perspective. My thesis will examine the queens' strategic use of language to shift power differentials between genders within the context of divine love as the original creative impulse of nature. In the playtexts, I will explore how Shakespeare's warrior queens use poetry to maneuver the men in power, and balance divine intuition with earthly war game tactics to negotiate sexual freedom between marriage and death.

In this reading, both of Shakespeare's queens represent a threat, as Foreign, or Other, to male-ordered civil and domestic peace. Both Hippolyta and Cleopatra reign in unnatural freedom until constrained by men, in marriage or death, under the patriarchal system. However, these two plays also demonstrate that the ambivalence

of love is neither predictable nor gender specific. While women naturally embody creative potential and passive submission, I will demonstrate how Shakespeare also arms his warrior queens with critical displays of stereotypically masculine qualities of duty and reason. And so, although the queens' physical presence as warriors appears to fail to protect their bodies from containment, their feminine ability to create reality through language restores the original female balance of power.

This critical perspective suggests that aggressive self-defense is not exclusive to male authorities, as the playwright shows his world-conquering men emasculated by passion before the plays begin. Both sexes provide equally fair game for Cupid's blind archery and Puck's sporting mix-ups. Shakespeare plays on the naturally human antagonism which flares over changeable desires versus voluntary action. In my review of existing Shakespeare scholarship, I identified a lack of scholarly material addressing how Hippolyta's and Cleopatra's warrior status plays into their roles as lovers who struggle against, or alongside, the men who claim to love them. The chief questions I will ask are: "How does Shakespeare depict his queens?"; "Why does he depict them in a traditional male role?"; "How do the warrior queens use language to defend personal and political power?"; and "What does the use of language reveal about his queens?"

My reading will contain a close analysis of play-texts, as well as critical analyses on the plays. I will also show how Shakespeare backgrounds his version of the ancient love story in older mythologies familiar to his Christian audience, such as the Biblical creation story, Hesiod's *Theogony*, and tales from Ovid and Chaucer.¹⁴

¹⁴ Shakespeare's analysis of marriage in *Midsummer* includes Shakespeare's choice of using Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" as a way of bringing "formes of things Vnknowne" to his hearers. Shakespeare's

Olson points out that “The entire play (*Midsommer*) might be seen as a skillfully composed fabric of iconological referents giving local habitation to the invisible and abstract entities which would likely claim the attention of a marriage audience” (*Court* 98). I submit that when Shakespeare overlays literary characters such as Gaia and Ouranos, and Adam and Eve, with allegorical figures from nature, such as Venus and Mars, onto his own warrior queens, he demonstrates the power of mythopoetics. This device strengthens the common theme of erotic violence with Shakespeare’s lovers and provides a divine vantage point from which to view the battle of the sexes, on earth, as it is in heaven.

attitudes on marriage “might have come down to him from the middle ages, or he could have found it in 16th century sermons, scriptural commentaries, marriage manuals, or encyclopedias of general knowledge, in which the love found in well-ordered marriage was regarded—in the words of Chaucer’s Theseus—as part of ‘the faire cheyne of love’, and “this divine love, this perfect harmonie, like as in musicke, also maintained the patterned hierarchy of society and kept the stars in their paths” (Olson *Court* 99). When the fairy pair beats the ground in a circular fairy dance, Oberon calls for harmonious music which may be the “*mundane musica*” which “preserves chaste loves and keeps the stars from wrong” (Olson *Court* 99). This dance was given universal significance as a symbol of divine love. Thus, in Olson’s opinion, “the king and queen of the otherworld arrive at the ordered condition which Theseus and Hippolyta had reached at the play’s beginning” (Olson *Court* 115).

Chapter 1

Background: The Bard Sings the Eternal Story

After four centuries of outspoken misogynists since the Reverend John Knox, most modern feminist critics, including Dr. Ashley Montagu, focus on gender as a patriarchal construct to control the female body's divine, creative power. He observes: "The inflation of the male ego depends on the preservation of the myth of male superiority, and subordination of women. Men see only what and how they want to see" (Montagu 280). Rather than reprising existing critical debates, I will take a distinctively Shakespearean position that "both are correct" and consider the ways in which the queens' presence, as warriors, might highlight a deeper and higher view of the gendered power struggle. I will explore how Love might rebalance the natural masculine aggression *in both sexes*, so they might naturally blend more smoothly in mutual respect.

The predominant critical tradition of misogyny gave way to predictable outrage when silenced females reclaimed their voices. In *Shakespeare and Gender*, Deborah Barker and Ivo Kamps explain that "Since the 1970s, feminist Shakespeareans have had to operate on the fringes" and "overcome obstacles presented by the powerful indifference of a fairly homogeneous and privileged domain of male scholarship. They have, and still have to, weather the full force of the old guard's critical acumen aimed at censoring, ghettoizing and/or ridiculing their modes of literary analysis" (Barker and Kamps 1-2). Carol Thomas Neely complains:

In spite of all that the topoi of the new theoretical discourses seem to have in common with feminist criticism...their effect has been to oppress women, repress sexuality, and subordinate gender issues. Even the view of man/woman as just one more of the outmoded, interchangeable parade of binary oppositions has the effect of putting woman in her customary place, of reproducing patriarchy—the same old master plot. (*Feminist Modes* 7)

The moral war is less predictably gendered, but every bit as heated, in terms of how to best control the creative female. Thus, the battle reflects the universal power struggle, metaphorically converging in the space between worlds, above and below, as well as merging the moment of conception with the moment of disintegration. This uncontrollable “eternal moment” of blinding sexual ecstasy, when time ceases to be, and opposites become one, has divided couples, families, clans, countries, and cosmic worlds, in wars on many levels; Shakespeare treats these concepts in both plays addressed in this thesis. Theseus opens *Midsummer* in urgent anticipation of his wedding night, using “Now” to dramatize the moment (1.1.1). That word choice announces that things are different than they were before, like Kermode’s New Testament revision of the eternal story from mortal tragedy to divine comedy. Theseus whines that the “old moon” “dowager” “lingers his desires” (1.1.4-5), and Antony exhorts Cleopatra: “There’s not a minute of our lives should stretch / Without some pleasure now” (1.1.48-9). The mortal warrior queens, however, put the men off, and the Fairy Queen has also “forsworn *his* bed and company (2.1.62). In fact, all of these first speeches declare sexual strikes: political protests over patriarchal violence.

Male critics display awe and terror toward Female power. For example, George Bernard Shaw opens his searing commentary with: “The very name Cleopatra suggests at once a tragedy of Circe, with the horrible difference that whereas the ancient myth rightly represents Circe as turning heroes into hogs, the New Testament romantic convention

would represent her as turning hogs into heroes” (Shaw 716), In a similar tone, discussing Her power, Homan elevates the level of horror from hogs to women: “Cleopatra’s transforming powers are ‘enchanting’ (I.ii.128), and she can be thought of as the sinister black magician who would steal men from their true selves and make them into *women*” (Homan 187). This transformative capacity is precisely my position. While Homan alludes to an allegorical figure like the Great Whore of Babylon (Rev. 17:2), I will argue that her charm is better likened to Queen Omphale’s transformation of Hercules. For, as we have heard of Cleopatra, “vilest things / Become themselves in her” (2.2.245-6), and the Fairy Queen can “purge” Bottom’s “mortal grossness.”

However, Shakespeare shows both sides of humanity, and will not be pigeonholed into any single critical theory. However, I will provide an overview of the most characteristic male misogynist, feminist, alchemist, universalist, essentialist, humanist, existentialist, complementarist, New Hystericist, cultural materialist, Christian, Romantic, and queer readings, for a fresh view of what other poets apprehend as a resolution to *discordia concors*. This chapter includes a discussion of the context of the Amazonian background of both plays, followed by a literature review that details misogynistic and feminist readings of Hippolyta and Cleopatra, alongside close readings of the texts which relate to issues identified in extant research. I also explain my research methodology, the limitations of this thesis, and provide definitions of useful terms.

A Note on Amazons

Recent historical scholarship by Mayor (2014), Castor (2011), Davis-Kimball (2002), Jones (1997), Salmonson (1991), and Fraser (1990) confirms that Amazons and female warriors were well-known to early modern audiences. Wilde asserts: “The true Amazons fought on the pages of Homer and Herodotus, Plutarch, Aeschylus, and Hellanicus, in the Bronze and Iron Ages during the Classical Greek period” (1). However, Mayor opens her book with a description of “fierce warrior women dwelling on the fringes of the known world,” which implies both mortal *and* mythic legends, like Shakespeare’s warrior queens. Schwarz’s study of the Amazon encounter similarly complements Steiner’s divine echo in myth, as it concerns the tension between “really” and “not really” in terms of Amazon stories in the early modern period (Schwarz xii). She describes how larger-than-life, tyrannical female characters, such as Shakespeare’s Amazons, “who seem to prefer making war than making love,” can posit “triumphant claims of male recognition and uncomfortable disclaimers of the fantastic” (xiii).

I will argue that both sexes gravitate “home” to the creative feminine, after their masculine war-journeys, and thereby create their stories as immortal heroes. Using Schwarz’s study, I understand the Amazon as a “doubled figure” in the sense of a living body, as well as a trope or narrative (21-22). Amazons are “both alien and immanent,” and they exist “within the space of the subjunctive which enables them to figure a set of concerns as closely related to everyday life as they are mythologically remote” (Schwarz 11). In the word “immanent,” Schwarz clarifies that their narrative power does not lie within conventionally domestic space, or “what happened,” but in “their larger articulation of a structure of identity or desire” (11).

Shakespeare portrays his queens as mythical Amazons who train as warriors in order to avoid physical, and therefore political domination and enslavement in marriage. The matriarchal system privileges and protects the female's sole authoritative power over her sexual choices, and thereby facilitates the creation of her own final narrative. From this perspective, Hippolyta's defeat is legible even before *Midsummer* begins, since Shakespeare shows the Queen as a conquered version of the mythical Amazon warrior in the *dramatis personae*, as "Theseus' betrothed" war prize. The word "betrothed" alerts the audience to the central crisis of forced heterosexual bondage which informs the action, since: "For the Amazons, the unyielding aversion to traditional patriarchal marriage was one of their defining attributes" (Mayor 260).¹⁵

Schwarz considers the Amazon Queen's story "the frame narrative" of *Midsummer*, even as it confirms patriarchy, in the opposition it represses, as a "structural conceit, as well as a critical voice" (207). She reads Hippolyta's fight as "a comic resolution that magically reconciles rebellious 'feminine' and individualistic desire to a rigid social hierarchy of aristocratic and patriarchal privilege" (207).¹⁶ "Titania and Hippolyta, the cosmic and the mundane," correspond as aspects of each other. From this perspective, the poet's powers align with the magical gods, as authors of civilization in the peace associated with marriage. The fact that their parts are often doubled in stage productions might help to visually aid the psychological connection and emphasize the analogous antagonism in the plot lines. So, as the paradoxical love-goddess of creation and destruction, these queens constantly violate the sociopolitical rules of decorum. And,

¹⁵ See also Traub *Lesbianism* ch. 4; Montrose *Shaping* 61; and Garner Jack 47.

¹⁶ See also Lisa Hopkins 51 and Barbara Freedman 164.

the fact that Shakespeare opens the play with a captive Amazon warrior queen promises to at least challenge that display of male power.

As Mayor explains, the Amazon mystique fascinated the Early Modern world with rumored springtime sex-raids of villages in pursuit of the best men with which to breed strong warriors, as the patriarchal system might be said to use women. Modern feminists Escolme (2014) and Dash (1997) posit that Shakespeare does not simply portray these bold queens as caricatures of the “pure seductress” (Dash *Wooing* 212), but as, “a cold-blooded ruling warrior who knows she is attractive to a rather vulnerable, elderly ruling warrior”, and “uses him—plausibly and understandably given the male-dominated political system in which she operates—to her own ends” (Escolme 151). With both Amazon raids and Titania’s fairy “rades” in mind, Mark Stavig notes that “the significance of spring, when Venus rules, and Mars is in decline, is of special interest to the love poets” (41). This resonates directly with descriptions of Amazon behavior that inverts the logical patriarchal “use” of the female to beget a race and confers authoritative power onto the creative female. The fact that both Hippolyta and Cleopatra had eunuchs and boy attendants reflects the mythical organization of the cosmos. And, it also identifies them with the Mother of God who received a son, in springtime, who would similarly sacrifice himself in the springtime for love of her.

Cleopatra as an Amazon

In the *Encyclopedia of Amazons*, Salmonson records Shakespeare’s source of Plutarch’s historical Cleopatra as the mother of a line of Amazons which includes Zenobia, the fierce governor of Egypt and Syria by right of ancestry, and “Mistress of Nations” around 250 A.D. (Salmonson 277). Like Zenobia, Shakespeare’s headstrong

Cleopatra is portrayed as both a monstrous curiosity and a foreign treasure (Castor 69). For these reasons, as Bevington asserts, “Octavius’ highest priority is to take Cleopatra back to Rome as the *piece de resistance* of his triumphal entry into the city” (*Ideas* 184). However, in a typical Amazon warrior gender-inversion, Cleopatra displays Antony as *her* captive, in her extravagant barge-chariot of her own design, before crucifying him, burying him in her monument, and resurrecting him in her love poetry. In this way, she escapes Octavius, using the same ambiguous triumphal entry metaphor, in marriage, as solemn, interchangeable, and akin to death. So, she escapes the historical depiction of the slain dragon, and sets the stage for Shakespeare’s defiant and magnificent queen.

Like Hippolyta’s Amazon society, Shakespeare’s Egypt is a kingdom of foreign women and Others, with only the eunuch, miscellaneous messengers, and the soothsayer, to serve the queen and her women. Again, like the Amazons, Cleopatra does not seem to care for her children, and switches lovers like horses to suit her political needs (1.5.553-569, 595-601; 5.2.3557). Feminist and New Rhetoricists have read that Cleopatra destroys Antony when his strength fails to serve her needs and resurrects his memory as her “Lord of Lords” and her “man of men” when she requires his persona for her own ends. On the other hand, Dusinberre asserts that Cleopatra “unmans” Antony deeply enough to temporarily usurp his inclination to duty, “as Venus did to Mars” (56). Dusinberre explains that “through an act of ventriloquy” (1.1.21-25) the queen “creates a female subversion of Caesar’s master-text of control” (56). The Queen of Egypt arms herself for war alongside Antony, and he laments to Cleopatra’s eunuch, “She has robb’d me of my sword” (4.14.23). This defensive attitude indicates the male lacking agency.¹⁷

¹⁷ The Romans viewed eunuchs with “horror” (Plutarch *Antony* 60.1), because of their absolute submission to the monarch (Herodotus *Histories* 6.9, 32) especially a queen. They stood for all things female, or ruined maleness: “the

G. Jackson explains that “the Elizabethan *virago* is a woman strong beyond the conventional expectations for her sex, and thus, of a masculine spirit” (48) and that “the need to neutralize the virago, however admired, is as pervasive as the evident fascination with her, and a tribute to the force of that fascination” (53-54). In the paternal figure of Egeus, Shakespeare’s comedy and tragedy demonstrates two ways to neutralize a virago—transfigure her in marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth, or disfigure her in death. But, as G. Jackson concludes, “Once the ways in which disturbing ideological positions are neutralized by Shakespeare’s *Dream* have been made clear, it seems well to point out that the theatre is an illusionistic medium, and that to neutralize onstage is not necessarily to neutralize in reality” (58). Thus, Hippolyta’s containment in marriage, and Cleopatra’s containment in death might simply provide an illusion that the warrior queens have been “reliably neutralized”, meaning disempowered, eliminated, or properly returned to male control. Because “She (the mythical warrior queen) is too powerful to be wedded in another key” (G. Jackson 54), it is necessary to consider the role of divine intervention.

In Cleopatra’s lines—“All strange and terrible events are welcome, / But comforts we despise”—she mirrors the fearless Spartan warrior and dramatically “boys” him at the end of the scene: “Then, Antony...but now—well, on” (4.4.38). Thus, “for a brief moment, she seems to harmonize both sexes in herself” (Barton *Divided* 121). Barton importantly contends that Cleopatra’s quintessential female power rests in her poetic ability to transform reality. Thus, she refocuses the spotlight onto her speech, which

effeminacy, docility, servility, and impotence of the Egyptian way of life” (Blits *New* 17). The eunuch lives the politically powerless life of a female, except even less, as he cannot participate in creating children, in any capacity, or ever have sex with anyone. It is a life of constant denial of nature, and social ridicule. Cleopatra’s first stage direction confirms their status as below all women, as the Queen enters, accompanied by “*her Ladies...with Eunuchs fanning her*” (1.1.10).

demonstrates that Amazons might invert the patriarchal gender dynamic to subject the men to the same authoritative inscription they have imposed on women. However, in the complementary Shakespearean spirit of grace and comic peace, I expect to find that the fictional gender binaries dissolve in the presence of, and desire for, the androgynous Amazon as the Essential Female.

Shakespeare's characteristically ambiguous texts allow the hearers to view both queens as powerless victims, as well as bewitching man-killers. For example, Dante condemns Cleopatra to the second circle in his *Inferno*, while Chaucer sanctifies her as the first of his saints of love in his hagiography. Northrop Frye calls her "the emasculating female—Circe transforming men into swine, Venus disarming Mars" (*Fools of Time* 72).¹⁸ They both compete and comply with the male rulers. Linda Charnes celebrates Cleopatra as equal to Caesar in political reasoning power, opposing the perspective of Harley Granville-Barker, who would entitle the play "Caesar and Antony", footnoting the queen as a pawn or commodity to be traded, like Octavia.¹⁹ Phineas Fletcher's account of the fight depicts the two armed foes "equal" until Hippolyta bared her face, and thereby "changed the erotic conflict in midfight" and "Conquer'd the conqueror, and wan the fight by losing" (144).

In this view, it is possible to read Hippolyta's power as wisely knowing when to change the terms of the fight and stun her opponent with a gaze, like Medusa.²⁰ In this case, she saves herself from possible death by trading herself as an exotic commodity, in

¹⁸ See also Deats 16.

¹⁹ See also Glenn *Rhetoric Retold* 73; and Ornstein 89.

²⁰ Incidentally, Elizabethan world explorer Sir Walter Raleigh imagined that "The Medusa sometimes appears as an Amazon warrior queen" (Raleigh *The Discoverie* 10:367. This link makes the reciprocity of violence and sexuality explicit: both link eroticism to monstrosity; both obscure distinctions between agency and victimization. For instance, the sight of this powerful woman makes the spectator stiff with terror, and also stiff with lust before he dies, robb'd of his sword-power. She petrifies them like stones.

exchange for earthly power, as Cleopatra does, without apology. It is evident, then, that each combatant has a great deal to lose, and that the heterosocial agreement of erotic love reroutes the killing energy into a conquering act of sexual violence. And yet, Cleopatra's "female sexual agency does not displace or disable masculinity but causes and constructs it" (Schwarz 148). The Essential Female turns the man to stone as the immortalized, marble-constant hero of her universal creation story. Thus, the image of the queen's face juxtaposed to her armored warrior's body suggests that she is aggressively *both at once*, making masculinity a visible female performance" (Schwarz 148).

Charnes argues that Antony serves as the pawn between Caesar and Cleopatra,²¹ doomed to dissolve and die (*Notorious* 110-111.). And Simpson insists that "the play might have been called, *Cleopatra*, as appropriately as *Hamlet*, or *Othello*." (333)²² In fact, Bradley's character study on Cleopatra sets her on the level of Hamlet and Falstaff and describes *them* in terms of *her*: Their infinite variety could never be stalled by custom" (*Oxford* 299). Wright suggests that "A female Worthy is a queen, or leader, manifesting the same kind of excellence as a Hector, a David, or an Arthur, but, above all, they must be warlike" (629). By using "a" before each name, she connects the poetic memory of a human to an immortal myth in the aevum library. And, Barroll marks the beginning of the necessary sea-change Shakespeare might have hinted at, in all of his heroines, but especially Cleopatra: "We can do the queen the honor of taking her seriously, as a tragic character fashioned by the world's greatest playwright. Little is gained by dismissing some of Cleopatra's odder moments as 'typically female.' We must begin to consider her as seriously as we do the tragic figures who are men" (Barroll

²¹ In 1901, George Bernard Shaw wrote a play entitled *Caesar and Cleopatra*.

²² In 1859, Hugo first proclaimed Cleopatra as "the sovereign figure" that gives the play its unity (498)

Dreaming 134). Following this line of thinking, throughout this thesis, I will explore the idea of what Shakespeare might have wanted us to apprehend in “a Hippolyta” and “a Cleopatra.”

Literature Review

Alchemist Patrick Harpur summarizes the “great work” of the imagination as “a religious work of the soul” which reconciles opposites by the principle of alchemical, or “scientific analogy” (146). He posits that the overall aim of mythology is to reunite Heaven and Earth in the movement of the mythopoeic imagination, itself, in which all the pairs of elements are raveled up in a grand, sacred marriage” (146). Like the action of the fairies in *Midsummer*, and Fortune in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the alchemy is going on behind the scenes, and the artist “merely collaborates with it.” And, “in the struggle to transform the world,” he is also making his own soul.” (235) In the Elizabethan psyche, “the ‘spirit’ seed of puritanism was steadily growing up through the old soil ‘soul’ of the Catholic order, behind which stood an even older pagan order” (235). Thus, literature establishes natural limits over hopes and fears.

Frye simplifies: “Literature, then, is not a dream-world: it’s two dreams, a wish-fulfillment dream and an anxiety dream, that are focused together, like a pair of glasses, and become fully conscious vision” (*Imagination* 102). Shakespeare’s warrior queens represent the doubled nature of the ancient Female,²³ imagined as an immortal serpent,

²³ For more on this topic, Adrienne L. Eastwood points to Schwarz’s study to frame the double nature of the mythic Female: “Amazonian myths take on an ambiguous quality, either as positive symbols of female power, or as elicitors of male anxieties about female power.” Eastwood also asserts that “Both Hippolyta and Titania are ultimately denied options; they are forced—by sword or drugs—into compliance with patriarchal control” (Eastwood 173). Eastwood’s critical posture is one of defensive victimization, rather than positive Female agency and choice.

the infinite uroboros, “wrinkled deep in time” (*Ant.* 1.5.29) though “age cannot wither [her], nor custom stale / Her infinite variety,” similar to Cleopatra (2.2.242-3). The doubled figure of Eve/Mary consolidates the pagan mascot of the Amazons in the image of the eternal Mother of God. In this mythopoeic process, “culture is transformed back into Super-Nature” (Harpur 146). Therefore, Shakespeare transfigures the cultural struggles, such as confusion over gender hierarchies, into supernatural cosmic forces that the poet uses in his art: Life and Death, Gaia and Ouranos, Venus and Mars, and the Fairy King and Queen.

Harpur further explains that the memory is a dynamic theatre, where the stored images take on their own life, interacting like the gods and myths of which they are composed, and creating new imaginative configurations which are “so powerful we are convinced of their truth” (213). He suggests that the ancient Greek subjugation of the matrifocal mythologies, and the Judeo-Christian denial of the Great Mother Goddess, constitute “an oppression of the feminine by the masculine in modern man” (241). The hero, born out of the primordial feminine unity must leave the womb-like enclosure and then “reunite itself with soul, the eternal Feminine goddess, in a divine syzygy that will usher in a whole new state of consciousness in which Heaven and Earth are at last wed” (Harpur 241). If the end goal of mythology is the sacred marriage, then Harpur’s theory meshes with Kermode’s idea of a comic ending to mythology in the New Testament wedding in Revelation 22:17 (Olson *Beyond* 119). The longed-for reunion steps out of imagination, or the book of Revelation, into chronological time, in culture, by way of the alchemical process of Love. And thus, when Christ stepped into literal history as the Word of God, or Truth, or Love, “myth suffered a blow” (Kermode *Sense* 81). In other

words, when Shakespeare's warrior queens marry with the ancient heroes, the cosmos also reunites with its soul of Love. Just as Jesus was a man-like God who raised mankind up to paradise, Hippolyta might sacrifice her independence and free will to Theseus to save her people and the city. Likewise, Cleopatra might haul up her lover, who died for her, as Christ on the cross, and die with him to stop the tragic permutations and fix a comic ending to the process.

Like Hesiod's and Ovid's mythologies, Plutarch's histories, and Chaucer's tales, Shakespeare translates his heroes. Similarly, the Old Testament God, both creator and destroyer, transforms his heroes for the love of the feminine ideal. Both Theseus and Antony can be read as translated from old warring tyrants to lovers, who sacrifice their public lives of pride and glory for private peace. Christ's incarnation demonstrates the soul's dual nature of human and divine. His choice to die makes way for the *Pax Romana*, or "time of universal peace" (4.6.4) which prefigures the New Jerusalem (Rev. 3:12, 21:2) or the city of Peace.²⁴ Following that example, Theseus's choice of "another key" founds a new Athens, and Oberon demands that Titania "relent" and fix the world by giving him the boy, so that "all things shall be peace" (3.2.377; 5.1.408). These

²⁴ Andrew Fichter offers an important Christian historiographical view of the play's prophecy of "universal peace," as referring to thirty years before Christ's nativity (Luke 2:14). He explains that some Church Fathers see the *Pax Romana* as an adumbration of the *Pax Christiana*, in a retrospective "unfolding of a providential plan" (Fichter 99). And, Olson asserts, "To see the mythical plot in this way is to see it as an integral part of the total dramatic meaning of the play: the pattern of fall and redemption of the lovers" (Olson 115). In this, we are meant to recognize an impulse that is completed in Christian miracle" (Fichter 100). And, paradoxically, we are also meant to recognize that in the pre-Christian world of this play, the transcendence to which they aspire is tragically impossible" (Fichter 100). That evidences the mythopoetic potential for literary transcendence from death into eternal narrative in myth. Therefore, Shakespeare seems to tempt his Christian audiences into this interpretation in order to play up the importance of myth, as the closest held narrative of transcendent love most of his readers understand. From another point of view, the image of the fall because of a serpent and an impious temptress is inverted in the vision of that same symbol as an image of Cleopatra's body as Antony's "space" where he locates "new heaven, new earth" (1.1.17). As Kott admired Shakespeare's genius, Olson states: "The language is susceptible equally to Stoic and Eucharistic interpretations—this is Plutarch rewritten in anticipation of Christian ritual" (Olson 106).

irrepressible polar shifts blind the men—for love of unconventional, rule-breaking women.²⁵ Similarly, after the “defeat” in containment, or visions of the divine, Hippolyta and Cleopatra might also reform, like Eve, and decide to follow their men in the natural course of human love. In this Christian reading, both characters’ militant opposition to the heroes provides a strong argument for the presence and ultimate support of Shakespeare’s equally powerful and highly disobedient women.

First, Shakespeare portrays Hippolyta and Cleopatra, the only two warrior queens in his canon, as mythical Amazons. He gives them this militant matriarchal force in order to realistically oppose their conquering heroes’ patriarchal control. Schwarz notes that “Stories about fierce Amazonian sexuality confirm the fear of emasculation” (155). This, importantly, *includes* the Amazon females as male warrior personae, who fear losing their male “sealing,” or narrative power to inscribe the female body, and thereby rule the world. So, the Amazon battlefield love-plays leave not only objectified female bodies, but the disabled bodies of men who reportedly follow.

William Painter’s account lends graphic weight to male fears of the “horrific maternal practice” of Amazons: “If by chaunce they kept any males back, they muredred them, or else brake their arms, and legs in sutch wise as they had no power to beare Weapons” (2). This explains that pregnant Amazons “taken” and “unmasked” as females, or “emasculated” on the battlefield, might retaliate by disabling their conquerors or male infants to avoid further threat. By this account, the Amazons emasculate their men militarily, but not sexually. Male captives remain subject to female will, or sexual

²⁵ In this spiritual overlay of the universal story, Odysseus was willing to leave earthly comforts and glory to suffer in the wars for the idea of Helen, representing his mature love for Penelope; similarly, Shakespeare’s mad lover “sees Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt” just as Antony sees Cleopatra (5.1.11).

demands. Thus, in the matriarchal society, the male hero is no longer free, but rather pinioned, hobbled, and declawed, as women in the patriarchal society.

This Amazonian practice protects physically vulnerable female warriors during pregnancy and motherhood, after the women choose and require the male heroes to sexually emasculate, or “defeat” them. Thus, in both warring political systems, both sexes “take” their prisoners, and maim or disarm martial power, in a naturally complementary way. They, similarly, “stake out”, “plant their flag”, or “mark” their new territory, to physically prove their masculine dominance with the phallic sword, and, simultaneously create new life and social culture. Montaigne explains why this female practice is important in our discussion of Shakespeare’s choice of the Amazon metaphor in these plays: “In that feminine commonwealth of theirs, to avoyde the domination of men, they were wont in their infancie to maime them, both in their armes and legges and other limmes, that might any way advantage their strength over them, and made onely that use of them, that we in our World make of Women” (*Essayes* 616). For the purposes of this discussion, “and other limmes” might refer to proper castration, but the critical socio-political point is that the matriarchal women retain the power to select and use men as they please. This view illuminates Hippolyta’s possible rational choice to “surrender” to Theseus, which parallels Cleopatra’s and Titania’s serial sexual overpowering of men.

Thus, in Schwarz’s Amazon encounter, Shakespeare offers a complementary, opposite social mirror which forces hearers to examine their individual and collective, particular and universal reflections, in material and metaphorical space in time. Montaigne highlights this social mirror effect in early modern texts like Shakespeare’s, which suggest that “men are always potentially disabled by women’s desire” (*Essayes*

616). He (re)locates and (re)names this mythical metaphor as a root cause for the erotic violence of male patriarchal rule, as well as the presence of Amazons—to represent and oppose it. From a feminist perspective, Berggren suggests: “When men revile women, they cry out against their own failures, hating themselves for what women ‘tempt’ them to; women, by contrast curse men for external, verifiable wrongs against them” (26). Shakespeare inverts the patriarchal captivity of warrior women, as types of Amazons, to demonstrate that the opposite effect in society is equally destructive.

Since Plutarch’s Theseus, men have tried to tame women’s sexuality through the political constraints of marriage; however, the stereotypical result lampoons witless men yoked by their own hands to caricatures like Chaucer’s Wyf of Bath: resentful, sexually uncooperative, and unnaturally vicious wives. Ania Loomba’s 2011 feminist-materialist analysis confirms Cleopatra as a “proper” androgynous Amazon who “brings together patriarchal fears of female government as well as sexual activity” (*Gender* 243).²⁶ In 1558, under the aegis of the Bible, Reverend John Knox famously railed against unmarried female rulers as alien to God. There he thunders that power is divinely ascribed to the male: “The immutable decree of God...hath subjected her to her husband...so that woman by the lawe of God...is utterly forbidden to occupie the place of God in the offices aforesaid, which he hath assigned to man, who he hath appointed and ordained his lieutenant in earth” (Knox 16-17). This explains the law of engendered political hierarchy in Theseus’s court.²⁷

²⁶ Bridget Escolme’s work explores the feminist theme that for misogynists, “Love is troubling because it seems to offer a powerful agency to female figures” (Escolme 166) Also see Charnes *Notorious* 197.

²⁷ For more on representations of gender and power in Elizabethan society, see Montrose “Shaping,” *Representing the English Renaissance* 31-64; and G. B. Jackson 40-65.

Olson notes: “Wedlock fulfilled its part in the concord of things when the male ruled his mate in the same way that reason was ordained to control both will and passions.”²⁸ Importantly, Olson explains the Early Modern Christian view of love holds that “Before the fall men propagated their kind according to the promptings of charity, but then Eve’s sensuality overcame Adam’s reason.”²⁹ So, “the fall transformed all divine, rational love in man into unreasonable and selfish lust, and, marriage was preserved against the complete ruin of rationality in man” (Olson 100). Thus, this agreement symbolically restores the relationship between man and his lost soul, and allows male intellect to overrule female willfulness with the blessing of the Church.³⁰ It is from this same church-justified point of view that Olson asserts the woman: flesh; man: spirit analogy from which John Knox accused the Amazon ruler as transforming men to Circe’s brutes” (100) (Knox sig. B3).

Kathryn Schwarz explains that, in Shakespeare’s time, “Enuious Men fearing their rules decay, / Gan coyne straight lawes to curb their liberty” (152; Spenser 3.2.2.1, 5-6). She observes that the word “enuious” belies unspoken insecurity around female creative power. This exposes gender hierarchy as legally imposed and sexual “liberty”, or difference, as carefully and constantly suppressed. And, as North’s Plutarch records, “the preservation of the lawes was an especial care of Theseus’ (North 135, n. 56). The conditions imposed by Pericles’ law in 451 ordered that women be “the daughter of a

²⁸ Cultural materialist, Calderwood cites the role of language as “an agent of social communion”, and credits Hippolyta’s “story of the night” for the naturally-gendered evolution of order between the sexes (*Illusion* 508). Similarly, Olson reads that “Shakespeare calls upon the familiar Renaissance conception of Theseus as the man who righted an imbalance in nature, compelling the Amazon queen to be true to her sex by becoming subordinate to his, thus reestablishing the proper relationship between man and woman” (Calderwood *Illusion* 511; Olson *Court Marriage* 95-117).

²⁹ This interpretation of the fall originates as early as St Augustine (*De Trinitate* lib. XII; cap. 12).

³⁰ Olson explains that Shakespeare found this view in the “Knight’s Tale,” among other sources. (KT 2986-3108).

citizen and a citizen's daughter" (Glenn 186). Olson notes that the Athenian law (1. 1. 119) is possibly the law of male hierarchy which Plutarch's Theseus set down (Plutarch *Vol I* 153-54; Olson *Court* 104; Freake 267, 269). Herodotus describes a period in the eighth century when the Cretans took their names from their mother's ancestry, as opposed to the patriarch's (Kerenyi 210).³¹ Wilde suggests that this clue connects the legendary "matri-potestal" or "mother-powered" Amazons to the combative priestesses of the Great Mother Goddess, including Artemis at Ephesus (8). This might describe the Amazon world in which Hippolyta reigned, under the protection of Diana or Artemis; the world Titania longs for with her votaress; and Egypt, under the reincarnation of Isis.

Wilde suggests that the "bright, burning, vital" mythopoetic power of the archetypal feminine "brings the world into being, animates its creatures, and gives them forms and names" (187). In the same way, the "poet's eye" "apprehends" visions of the eternal narrative in the sexual moment as "forms of things unknown," and "gives to airy nothing, a local habitation and a name." By definition, the matriarchal Amazon warrior queens remember and defend that kind of female power. Wilde concludes: "All of the components of the myth existed in different times and places, and if you piece all these fragments together, they make an image close to the Amazon archetype, whatever you name her" (191). Following this argument, I will examine how love might transfigure the masculinized Amazon matriarchs to recall their innate power, and similarly rename and relocate that power to embrace the creative paradox in marriage and motherhood.

³¹ "Cleopatra," for example, means, "glory of the fathers" and Caesar refers to her in terms of her male line: "Ptolemy." Irigaray suggests that the figures of women, in Shakespeare's plays, "exist only to validate the male subject" (86). Stavig concurs that Shakespeare's women are almost invariably defined by their hierarchical relationships (49). Examples include Hippolyta's *dramatis personae* identification as Theseus's betrothed, and Cleopatra's as a whore and a strumpet.

Neumann importantly asserts: “the ruling symbol of this condition is, ‘ascension,’ and its symptoms include, ‘losing the ground from under one’s feet,’ and, ‘loss of the body’”, in a positive sense. (*Origins* 385) However, Nuttall notes that the old meaning of “effeminate” is “subdued and brought low by a woman,” but adds a New Testament ending: “made a deity at his death” (*Thinker* 323). With all of his available choices, Sir Philip Sidney uses Hercules to perfectly balance his depiction of comic effect: “Hercules, painted with his great beard and furious countenance, in a woman’s attire, spinning at Omphale’s commandment, breeds both delight and laughter” (*Apology* 151). Similarly, Nuttall describes Antony’s rhetoric as “swelling and exultant” (*Thinker* 324), and claims that the word effeminate “entails neither reduction nor annihilation, despite death, but an immense expansion of being, an amplification” (323). So, “stirr’d by Cleopatra” (1.1.45), Antony is literally, and figuratively, elevated and civilized by the feminine, as Hercules.

Following possible visions, the warrior queens lose their masculine edge to dominate and agree to stand by their heroes. In the same way, Hercules’ legendary rage dissipated in the Lydian Queen Omphale’s lap. Her ancient Greek name, “ομφαλος,” means “the navel” or “center of the universe.” Similarly, Venus beguiled Mars to give up his sword-power to her in their heavenly mingle of sexual conquest, and the divine result is Cupid, or Harmony.³² Thus, all warriors might dissolve the masculine into the creative feminine to effect redemptive peace. Peter Saccio observes that “Analogous actions constitute a primary wavelength in Shakespearean drama” which applies to the warriors’ memory of the Great Mother (*Word Part I* 25). In her, “infinite variety” and “cunning

³² The Classical tradition most often cites Cupid, or Harmony, as the result of Mars and Venus—the symbolic relationship of love over war. It is significant that the character of Cupid is central to the Greek comedy, in Puck. Also Antony’s man, Eros, is sworn to loyalty, but then betrays his oath, expressing similar unpredictability as the Roman god of love.

past man's thought" (1.2.144), Cleopatra's feminine power abolishes even the ancient laws of human behavior and social restraint.

Likewise, Olson explains that Hippolyta was remembered in the Renaissance, as she was in the Middle Ages, as the ruler of a nation that overturned fixed hierarchy, violated the traditional order, and "usurped the duties of the male reason by the lower, female passions" (*Court* 102). Hippolyta attacks Theseus to usurp his rule, and Titania, as Hippolyta's subconscious dream-version, similarly engages in a socio-political and sexual rebellion that threatens the universal balance. On a supernatural level, "proud Titania" (2.1.60), as Oberon complains, mirrors the commonplace gender-inversions of the militant, and sexually independent, Amazon matriarchal societies. Similarly, Cleopatra understands her central power as sexual, and proudly reels off her royal conquests as a "morsel for a monarch" (1.5.31). The "great fairy" (4.9.12), Queen Cleopatra, enchants Antony in similarly incantatory speech to restrain him, as though she would rule the known world using his political power (1.3.87-92).

However, despite their Amazon efforts, Shakespeare presents both rebel queens as prisoners who appear to have lost the battle of the sexes. In Theseus' patriarchal court, "women are regarded as chattels, or possessions, and Hippolyta accepts that she is beaten, and marries with the regal grace that is her heritage" (Bevington *How* 16-17).³³ The parallel story of Queen Titania's sexual abuse by Oberon demonstrates that the battle of the sexes is traditionally settled in favor of the male, as consumer. Shakespeare clearly displays the battle, in Antony's jealous stance, when he tries to shame the Queen's sexual power using the same word she proudly used to flaunt it. He says he, "found" Cleopatra

³³ See also Ornstein 89.

as “a *morsel*, cold upon / dead Caesar’s trencher—nay, you were a fragment / Of Gneius Pompey’s—” (3.8.117-19). The men are excluded from the mysterious rites of womanhood and seem to be jealously motivated by a characteristically male impulse to put down rebellion by sexual domination.

As Shaw likened the mythical female to Cleopatra, as a version of Circe, Montagu notes that the same jealous gods, like Zeus, still marginalize women for the very cause that men envy women, “investing their advantages with mysterious, evil, or dangerous qualities, like witches”(82). In other words, patriarchs since Zeus have understood that women possess something they lack, and so they created a myth to demonize the divine. For instance, “fantasies of castration and impotence include the freezing touch of the witch, vaginas with snapping teeth, phallic succubae, taboos against menstrual blood, and testify to the deep anxiety underlying patriarchal attitudes” (Montagu 106). Montrose affirms the view of Amazon mythology as the symbolic embodiment of male cultural anxieties over female power.³⁴ He focuses on the power of the female, “not only to dominate or reject the male but to create and destroy him,” which is “an ironic acknowledgment by an androcentric culture of the degree to which men are in fact dependent upon women for their birth and nurture; upon mistresses and wives for validation of their manhood” (Montrose “Shaping” 36). Stavig agrees that “Shakespeare uses the eccentricity of women, poets, and madmen, since they might yield truths about the system to which they are marginal” (9). Thus, Shakespeare might wink at the feminine core in both sexes, as the redemptive agent of Love.

³⁴ For more on contemporary views of the Amazons, see William Painter’s “Novel of the Amazones,” which opens the second tome of *The Palace of Pleasure* (1575). See also Wright 433-56.

Stempel insists that the play is about, “the especially vicious methods of warfare” in, “the perennial battle between the sexes” (Stempel 63). The major theme is, “the safety of the state, and the disease, or chief danger is Cleopatra, and the play ends, as it should, with the defeat and death of the rebel against order” (63). Similarly, Brooks calls women such as Hippolyta, Titania, and Hermia, “afflicted” with the desire for female choice, as, “the imaginative disorder in the vision of reality” (xcii). At the beginning of *Midsummer*, Theseus summarizes the convention of patriarchy in six lines that sound like a form of Aeschylus’s ancient Greek bullying: “Be advis’d, fair maid, your father is to you as a god.” (1.1.46-7) Schwarz asserts that this proves the unnatural process of gender hierarchy as a male agenda: “It betrays flaws in the normative model it produces” (210).

Conversely, I posit that Hippolyta’s Amazon presence further belies an anxious underbelly in Theseus’s first lines. His prerequisite opening speech sounds smooth and authoritative but might also be read as a question. Theseus may be heard as an insecure tyrant excusing his “injuries,” in a similar manner as his later statement: “Come, my Hippolyta; what cheer, my love?” (1.1.122). In a parallel theme, Cleopatra speaks first when the lovers first appear, and Antony’s responses nearly always follow her irrepressible lead. It is significant that both queens open their final acts, which importantly emphasizes control of their stories. If plays about love and marriage seem an unlikely place for Amazon warrior queens, it is still more unlikely that they will act as the spokespersons for their stories. However, visions of love might refresh the memory of the Great Mother and translate the battle to “another key” of peace.

Desmet notes that “despite her status as a prisoner”, Hippolyta functions as “spokesperson” of these poetics (Buccola *Fairies* 69). Kathryn Schwarz identifies a

critical shift in criticism of *Midsummer*, “sometime in the mid-twentieth century,” when “Hippolyta, the Amazon warrior with two percent of the play’s lines began to speak for the whole play” (205). Rene Girard widens that view when he identifies the play as, “a serious genetic theory of myth” because of the warrior queen’s symbolic presence” (*Violence* 211). And that kind of sticking-out oddness is just the sort of thing Shakespeare plants to highlight old symbols, in order to refresh, replace, and revise the old story.

Both queens’ grace-filled speech bookends their plays. And Hippolyta’s presence as a metaphor, or muthos/true story, in a play about imagination and enchantments, paradoxically grounds the play in solid space and time. However, the rhythm of her first speech sounds like a spell or prophecy: “Four days will quickly steep themselves in night; / Four nights will quickly dream away the time” (1.1.7-8). Hippolyta’s patience with convention suggests reason and good sense, but, again, Schwarz hears Hippolyta’s voice as mysteriously “liminal,” like her supernatural fairy soul, as well as “magnificent, primeval heroism in the lofty opening poetry” (206). Both here, at the opening of *Midsummer*, and in her pivotal five lines about the story of the night, Hippolyta sounds like an enchanting prophetess, or priestess. Schwarz explains that the warrior queen’s wedding story is so awkward and full of questions that it cannot help but raise critical feminist eyebrows over its revision of the mythical battle between the sexes. While scholars like Schwarz have addressed the liminality of these lines, I will contend that these gendered contrarities coexist in the Essential Female.

Schwarz also suggests: “Comedy makes sexual politics into literary conventions, taking socialized desire as plot, and claiming an ordered hierarchical discretion as its narrative end” (210). Although this introduction seems to assume that all conflict has

already been “resolved”, critics like Schwarz suggest that Hippolyta’s identification in the *dramatis persona* challenges the conventional narrative of the patriarchal claim, and absorption of her power, or her body. Schwarz observes that audiences and critics “persistently” return to Hippolyta “because she catalyzes a sense of narrative excess” (210). Frye supports her imaginative reasoning: “What critical ability there is in his lunatic, lover, poet family belongs to Hippolyta, whose sharp comments are a most effective contrast to the Duke’s amiable bumble, and, “the Queen’s story has “a consistency to it that lunacy would lack” (*Fables* 108).

In *Engendering a Nation*, co-authors Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin agree that “in accepting the lovers’ consensus as a kind of authority for their story, she is willing to entertain the possibility of a realm of experience that Theseus neither dominates nor acknowledges” (36). Desmet argues further that the play’s poetic structure and language speaks out against Theseus’s patriarchal construction of his own authority: “Through the art of the rhetorical ornament, the play counters Theseus’s rationalist ethics with a feminized fairy poetics” (300). Thus, since *Midsummer’s* theme of the battle of the sexes might be characterized by the line, “reason and love keep little company together, now-a-days” (3.1.136-7), Hippolyta’s marriage poetically unites contrarities.

Hippolyta stabilizes her world when she apprehends the mysterious unity of the moonlight encounters and translates Theseus’s “amiable bumble” to a useful story. Harpur defines the mythopoetic speech-act of blending contrarities as “faith.” Shakespeare provides Amazons in order to assign more dramatic value to this verbal bridging between earthly and spiritual transformations—from war to love. Why, or how else might such intensely confrontational and dangerous women choose to marry these

men? Why didn't Hippolyta kill Theseus, or herself? Why didn't Cleopatra hold out to kill Caesar and rule the empire? It seems that Love intervened in the queens' lives. To investigate these claims, I will examine their speeches to see if/when that might occur.

In an exposition of the paradoxical life cycle as characterized by the female, Marshall and Kott explain that Hippolyta's Amazon weapon is her bow, represented by the moon, which controls the naturally female creative powers of the world, including the imagination. The moon turns the tides, and seasons, over which Titania rules. This natural rhythm replicates the ebb and flow of life and death, sterility and fertility, decomposition and generation. The moon is traditionally gendered as a woman, since the creative cycle embodies itself in the similarly tidal female menses. In 1540, the verb, "to embody" carried a religious definition: "to incarnate", or, "to provide a spirit with a body." Thus, as Peter Saccio points out, the early modern audience blamed the moon for unexplainable, uncontrollable shifts in the physical world, and described its related psychological manifestations as "lunacy."

Since the female form embodies this creative force—and produces similarly frenzied attacks of desire, which often disable the faculties of reason and propriety in men—the patriarchal political system naturally fears the unruly female as a monstrous threat to law and order, as well as personal safety. Thus, "moonlight", or, "moonshine", connotes the mysterious realm of nocturnal revelation, dream, imagination, violent passion, poetic inspiration, and fluctuation. As a result of the moon's natural association with women, lunar effects are similarly gendered. Therefore, these effects are devalued, disbelieved, and blamed for most of the disturbances in the universe by the males in positions of authority. In this connective imagery, Shakespeare, therefore, foreshadows

Hippolyta's female intuition as a cosmic weapon, new bent to reorder chaos, as the moon constantly does. Here, again, the poet shows the female as the cosmic force of the soul. Montagu explains the positive power of the female intuition: "A woman's intuition, as everyone knows, is a true faculty that most women possess. It is a kind of sixth sense, an ability to listen in the dark..." (177) He asserts, "The great superiority it confers upon females can no longer be disputed", and, "to be jealous", and even afraid of it, is understandable" (179) This power must be respected by both sexes as divine, and yet, men have constructed laws around female roles, to disempower women.³⁵

As Kerenyi suggests:

No pattern has been more sustained over time than that of male supremacy", since the essentialist, "mythic kernel" contains the "primordial struggle over generation. And "nowhere is the arbitrary use of male power more explicit than in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." This explanation, "helps us understand how the essentialist views of myth link ancient Athens, Elizabethan England, and contemporary societies. (qtd. in Freake 272)

Kerenyi concurs with Frye and Saccio in his view of this play as another version of the patriarchal power over the female principle. Similarly, Bamber observes that "History is a grand narrative of male achievement which specifically denies any significant space to 'feminine Otherness'" (167), and therefore looks to "a female principle apart from history" in order to challenge the traditional male narrative. (140). So, men insist that hostile domination of unruly women is necessary and natural for them, and insist that women are inferior. However, kindness and sensitivity are the very *human* traits that

³⁵ Mayor notes that "No aspect of Scythian culture unsettled the Greeks more than the equal status of women" (37).

males need to develop.³⁶ Buccola claims that “the women of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* ‘show us how’” to return the men to a semblance of humanity (*Fairies* 82).

It follows that women who have been fed these distorting lies, and taken on warlike masculine traits to survive the discrimination, also need to heal and recover the feminine. Unfortunately, the painful irony in this view of the feminist outrage has only served to further eclipse the divine feminine. Montagu laments that “the feminist movement has, to some extent, demeaned the family, and the unsurpassingly important role of mother, wife, and child, and slighted the issue of individual choice” (257). For instance, Titania orders her attendants to “Tie up my love’s tongue, and bring him silently” (4.1.1021), as a defeated enemy warrior, or wild sexual fantasy, to be contained and exhibited in triumph.³⁷ Here, Titania might well articulate Hippolyta’s fantasy of subjugating Theseus. Similarly, Titania may act out the Amazon analogue that Hippolyta might have performed on the battlefield, when she physically restrains, and silences, the love-object of her choice, and leads her sex-slave to her bower, in a triumphal procession.

Titania’s actions might also reveal the Amazonians’ suppressed dreams of family life, as Shakespeare inverts the Renaissance myths of Amazon savagery after they unleash their voracious sexual appetites on selected males in May. On the other hand, Titania is also sexually silenced and led in triumphal procession. Thus, she fills both of those roles, for Oberon, in the battle of the sexes. So, the battle rages in the Old Testament system of “an eye for an eye” until it transfigures into the New Testament “turn the other cheek”, and die to self for the Other. Shakespeare seems to suggest that this is only possible with the aid of divine intervention, in an experience of the eternal

³⁶ See also Mitscherlich.

³⁷ Cleopatra leads Antony when she refuses to let him speak as he dies: “No, let me speak!” (4.16.45)

moment where time stops, and humans might imagine a new way of being together. Theseus quips: “With the help of a surgeon, he might yet recover...” (5.1.305), since Bottom needs to stop thinking like an ass to recover his humanity. On this theme, Olson observes that Shakespeare’s comedies, like *Midsummer*, offer marriage as the remedy for the earthly chaos in society. I would add that Cleopatra’s imagination of her eternal reality in mystical marriage might qualify for the same reasons.

Olson asserts that “Shakespeare almost always endows the marriage with a resonance beyond what appears on the surface” (*Beyond* 60). From this perspective, the poet’s eye marries heavenly and earthly bodies, as mythic metaphors of Love and Death, in the queens’ language. Cleopatra’s religious reference to love as salvific: “Eternity was in our lips and eyes”, parallels Hippolyta’s, “transfigured so, together.” These two analogous lines link the queens as priestesses of the spiritual realm and locate a mortal experience of heaven in the sacred ritual of sexual union in marriage. Olson calls this metatheatrical marriage of “authority and the realm of the sacred” a “transfiguring moment” (*Beyond* 69). And Kermode explains how the earthly marriage corresponds to the heavenly, as a figure to absorb the Old Testament tragedy in the New Testament Word of Love.

Ruskin observed that “Shakespeare has no heroes; he has heroines only. The catastrophe of every play is caused always by the folly or fault of a man; the redemption, if there be any, is by the wisdom or virtue of a woman, and failing that, there is none.” (qtd. in Montagu 177). Gabrielle Jackson offers a wider view of Shakespeare’s heroines as, “interrelated types of the Amazon, the warrior woman, the cross-dressing woman, and the witch.” (49) She emphasizes that “while the typical Shakespearean play does have a

very powerful sense of ending brought about by formal expository resolution of difficult issues, it is equally typical of Shakespeare to present unexplained and suggestive discontinuities” (42). Theseus’s unexplained reversal of attitude toward the lovers and overruling of law in Act IV—having backed up Hermia’s father in Act 1, by citing the unalterable law of Athens—provides a clear example of this type of discontinuity. I posit that Hippolyta’s graceful speech, and silence, influences this mysterious and pivotal change, and that her feminine power acts on Theseus like a sudden enchantment over his reason and previous perception of duty. Perhaps a Mars-like vision of Venus smooths his rough course, as Cupid’s arrow strikes, or love-juice clouds/clears his eye.

Stavig suggests that Shakespeare might innovate “a legitimate Elizabethan version of male feminism” when he gives his warrior queens this extraordinary “sight,” and they speak for the life force in re-articulating the eternal moment in the marriage of love and death. He claims that Shakespeare valorizes the feminine polarity of an older gender system, based on the natural world”, in order to move society under the “excessively patriarchal system back toward pious Feminine wisdom and humility” (10). Given this uncommon critical perspective, we might expect Shakespeare’s warrior queens to overrule in some heroic, authoritative way. Juliet Dusinberre asserts that: “Words are powerless women’s only weapons, and women parry powerlessness by becoming adept plotters, channeling into premeditation the energy which men expend in performance. Feminine cunning is proverbial,” and, “a skillful woman acquires a man to act on her behalf” (*Nature* 282-3).³⁸ This “infinite variety” of creative intuition is the

³⁸ See also, *Notorious Identity*, where Linda Charnes develops the idea of language, in terms of military strategies, and tactics, as a weapon to isolate, disorient, and disrupt identity of an enemy, in order to shift the power base (109). Further, Michel de Certeau develops the idea of how verbal tug-o-wars move people into new stories (39).

“something” that men lack. Cleopatra is “cunning past man’s thought, and thus, a “boggler, ever” (3.8.111), who is “beguiling” and “bewitching” Antony from earthly commitments “to the very heart of loss” (4.8.28) in performing her will.

By giving his mortal females words in the highest spiritual diction of wonder and prayerful worship of Love—including themes of eternity and transfiguration—Shakespeare asserts that the redemptive mythopoetic agency of creating heroic males belongs to the Great Mother Nature, or the Essential Female. Within the context of sexual love, their gifts promise to “purge” all “mortal grossness” when “vilest things / Become themselves in her”, and the immortal She, “make[s] defect perfection.” Shakespeare’s queens imitate this “poet” or “maker of heaven,” as the young Mary did, in assenting to receive the self-sacrificing will of God in her body. In the Annunciation, Mary said “Yes” to cooperate with her female nature and conjoin with God in a mystical marriage to literally, and imaginatively, “conceive” a human from heaven to earth and back again. I will illustrate how the art of Cleopatra’s speech-act transforms the work of “seeming”, or, “playing the queen”, and reveals her as “the fool I am not” (1.1.43). Rather, she is “the commander” (3.6.58) of her subject, Antony, and the universe. The playtext sees both characters borne into the immortal literary myths they become, together.

In the same way that Hippolyta’s poet’s eye bears heaven to earth, Cleopatra explains her poetic process: “‘Tis sweating labour / To bear such idleness so near the heart” (1.3.94-5). In this imagery, Cleopatra describes how it feels to contain, and bear Love, as “idleness.” In Antony’s rejoinder, “your royalty / Holds Idleness your subject, I should take you / For Idleness itself” (1.3.93-4), he names her as Love itself. It is notable that *Midsummer’s* magical flower is also known as “Love-in-Idleness” which further

connects Cleopatra with Titania, Cupid, Harmony, and the supernatural powers of Love and Death. Here, once again, their story evokes the greater fabled conception, labor, and birth of Harmony: the lovechild of Venus and Mars. Thus, Shakespeare emphasizes the female power of mythopoetic art which gives birth to heaven on earth.

This understanding seats the feminine force as redemptive: “Art can bring a civilizing grace to a savage or imperfect nature”, and elevate two naturally imperfect human beings to greatness, or divinity (Tayler 11). The fact that Cleopatra and Hippolyta are the only two characters who clearly describe their visions of their heroes as stronger than Hercules, and hasten to marry them, strongly suggests a divine connection to the Essential Female. And, the fact that both of their love stories “divinize” their dream-lovers, as heroes, demonstrates that women actually “civilize”, or bring forth the foreign male into the world through language, as both Hesiod, and the New Testament evangelists imagine.

However, Hesiod’s *Theogony* also clearly records how Nature’s original matriarchy shifted from the Titans to Zeus’ patriarchal system after the birth of the cosmos. Like his father, Zeus made war on his Titan parents and ancestral army, banished his mother, and set up his patriarchal reign on Mount Olympus (Hesiod 453-506, 617-726). And, according to Blits, Titania’s name—“daughter of Titans”—signifies that strife (*Soul* 151). Hesiod’s translator summarizes: “For most of the poem, it is the mother who matters, and the males are much less prominent, or altogether obscure”, as in an Amazon civilization. But even though he received all from his mother, Zeus is the “unquestionable center” of the poem, as supreme ruler (5). For our purposes, the connection to our female warrior queens lies in the central sexualization of Zeus’ authority. And when the power

shifted, Zeus sanctioned marriage, in order to sexually contain and convert disorder, by fathering: “Eunomia, (Law), Dike (Justice), and Eirene (Peace). Thus, “masculine dominance was equated with law and order” (Hesiod 5).

This mythology conjoins the two worlds by imagining natural events as people with names and habitations in heaven. For example, Mount Olympus parallels local cities and political structures on earth. Hesiod describes how Zeus and the other gods had regular literal and figurative intercourse with the mortals on earth. And, similarly, as I will address later, both of Shakespeare’s queens function in the same way, as Venus, and Isis. Montagu also explains that the female poet’s eye can naturally apprehend the divine, and engage in a kind of dreamplay between the two worlds. Shakespeare gives the queens the mythopoetic power to translate those visions to reality. This corresponds to the Mother of God who brings the Word of Love into the world, from heaven to earth.

In the New Testament version of this same creation mythology, St. John received the Biblical revelation of the Original Poet of Heaven, as “Theos”, or the patriarchal Father. The central creed of the Christian belief system states that the Almighty was naturally born through an assenting human female, and came down from heaven to restore loving communion between Himself, as double-gendered Nature, and his creation. St. John calls this god/man the Word of the Father, or divine Logos, which links the heavenly with the earthly “through the creative, not generative, energy of the Holy Spirit,” or language, as Vlachos clarifies (30). The monastic Bishop pinpoints this divine action of mythopoetics: “the union of the divine with the human in the hypostasis of the Word within the womb of the Theotokos constitutes the immediate deification of human nature” (31). The female godbearer, or “Theotokos”, is the vessel whose willing

participation in the divine process of creation gives birth to the peace which dispels fear, abolishes death, and provides spiritual reassurance of divine protection.

Montagu's theory suggests that both sexes contain a deep memory of the androgynous female Mother, but that Shakespeare specifically highlights the queens as masculine warriors in *Midsummer* and *Antony*. This might challenge the patriarchal gendering of reason as male, and passion as female, which falsely justifies the taming of females, as dragons. Shakespeare inverts this dynamic to suggest that the political subjection of either sex is unnatural, and, more importantly, to show how both sexes must reconnect with the original female energy to make peace with the Other. In apparent visions of the eternal moment of Love, the male warriors see the monstrous females as divine, and stop defending their patriarchal stances as divine authorities over them. And, in what seem to be similarly unexpected visions of Love, the queens stop defending their feminist stances as unnatural warriors, and protect their comic ending narratives by civilizing the tyrannical men in the blessed ritual of marriage.

Nature, or God, as the Original Poet of Heaven, endows both sexes with imaginative power to create through poetry. Hesiod depicts Gaia, the original Mother Nature, as a militant, castrating queen who protects herself and her children from her husband, Ouranos' power-crazed jealous destruction of the family. The Bible, similarly, blames the original earthly mother, Eve, for coercing Adam to disobey the Father's almighty rule, which broke their divine communion with God. And yet, it is Mary, as the new Eve, who is responsible for the affirmative speech-act that reopens divine communication. She accepts her role as a divine vessel and delivers God to the fallen world in the form of a savior baby. From this foundational set-piece in creation

mythology, poets have reinterpreted the war between the sexes as the result of the disobedience, or falling away, from the original Word of Love. Shakespeare stages the human experience of love and war in dream versions of that original plot, using metaphors of Biblical allusions, classical mythology, and English folklore as backdrops.

These points in classical creation mythology assert that Ouranos, the heavenly Father, was created to surround, protect, and serve Gaia: the Great Mother Nature. Similarly, biblical scripture claims that Christ came down from heaven to earth through Mary. Thus, Christ's mother apprehended and civilized this Son of God through the birth process, and, by her example, trained Him to sacrifice himself for his Mother and Bride, the mortal world, as His legacy of Love. However, the Old Testament Hebrew Bible assigns the *original* creative power of Love to the male, as Almighty Father, who corrects and contains female disobedience in His patriarchal Law. Shakespeare might challenge that assertion of male authority when he represents his queens as androgynous archetypes of the Essential Female, who disarm male authority through language. Shakespeare thus returns his warrior women to their position, as suggested by Hesiod, as created agents and protectors of Her reproductive power.

Alternatively, Shakespeare focuses on the New Testament revision of the patriarchal gender dynamic in the holy family. In that version of the eternal story, Joseph's only function is to support and protect the divine unit of the mother and child. And, like Shakespeare's men, Joseph can neither understand nor believe Mary's dream, until he has his own vision which rebalances his position before his creator, God, or the Word of Love, inside the Female. So, regardless of whether scholarly critics consider

Shakespeare's warrior queens as angels, or demons, on earth, their speech-acts reveal the queens' figurative power as divine creators or poets.

A myth is a paradoxical figure of speech. It is both discrete and elusive, a scientific process and a metaphysical phenomenon. The process of reconciling opposites requires an act of "strong imagination," which Theseus calls "tricks" when he scoffs at the results as, "antic fables", and, "fairy toys." Saccio asserts that "the Elizabethans were easily moved from the world of physics to metaphysics by a process of analogous thought" (*Word Part 1* 39). Seeing these worlds together in the embodied mortal, Montagu points out that both sexes begin as externally "identical" females for six week in the womb, united with their "first nature" until the genetic males develop into the Other (37).³⁹ Frye explained that a mythic hero goes on an armed quest to recover something lost, and return to save his people. Schwarz adds that the Amazon encounter with men reveals the heroic journey for both sexes, in, "the rediscovery of something which is secretly familiar that has undergone repression and then returned from it" (xiii). Her comment refers to the feminine sensitivities to the divine mirror of the Other.

Shakespeare's message seems to assert that Love requires all jealous, power-seeking masculine tyrants *of either sex* to kill the Foreign Other, in order to recover the feminine. Regarding the concept of superimposing the cosmic and the mundane in an act of "strong imagination", Hesiod first mentions Love as one of the primeval cosmogenic deities born of the world egg which holds the universe together, encircled by all creation. He defines that irresistible divine force of "eros", as "gravity" (Hesiod 120). Saccio updates the concept thus:

³⁹ He adds that the distinguished endocrinologist, Dr. Alfred Hoet and others have suggested that "the basic surviving human form is female," and the male is something "additional." (Montagu 128)

Love, for the Elizabethans was not simply a personal emotion; not simply a romantic feeling, or a family tie; it was the glue of the whole universe...the order of society, and the coherence of Nature. The movement of the heavens, themselves, were thought of as being sustained by love, or by a power analogous to love. God is love, according to St. John, and love, according to Dante, is the power that moves the sun, the moon, and all the other stars. (*Word, Part 1* 39)

Neumann describes this urge toward love in community as, “the longing” and a “great pull” like gravity, exerted by the “great mass” of the unconscious, and symbolized by the uroboros.⁴⁰ Both Adelman and Neumann agree that the aim of both sexes’ primal urge toward psychic wholeness is to reunite with the original uroboros, or maternal matrix, in the Eternal Female, or Great Mother (Adelman *Suffocating* 187; Neumann *Fear* 3).

Neumann describes the uroboros symbol as a serpent forming a closed circle. Because the mother is nearly indistinguishable from the infant in this pre-ego state, that force takes on the female archetype as cosmic creator. He explains that the male must “surrender” his primal relationship and see the mother as “Other” in order to develop and stabilize his patriarchal ego as an archetypal hero “battling the dragon” (*Origins* 8). The matriarchal side of the uroboros, or Great Mother regards the masculine side as, “wholly other”, or, “her subordinate tool, helper, and satellite accessory” (Neumann *Fear* 14, 15). However, with the “invasion” of “the ravishing penetrator,” the “paternal uroboros,” the woman is “seized, and pierced, and transported beyond herself by an overwhelming power such as lightning, or gold” which causes her to recognize the divinity of the male figure (17). This inverted Amazon encounter sounds like what Hippolyta might have

⁴⁰ See also Frye *Anatomy* 83.

experienced on the battlefield, or in her mountaintop memory of Hercules and Cadmus, and is analogous to Cleopatra's memory of Antony as a mythic lover in her barge.

Mayor describes a historical example of the Amazon encounter, in Egypt, around 665 BC, before the Ptolemaic rule (332-30 BC), and before Davis-Kimball's listing of Cleopatra's line giving birth to Zenobia. Queen Serpot cursed and taunted Prince Pedikhons and attacked his army. To "do away with the evil serpent of an Egyptian", he challenged her to single combat. They fought all day "like panthers", and then, at dinner, he took off his armor and, "she suddenly did not know where she was because of the great desire that had entered into her" (Mayor 385). Similarly, Cleopatra likens her intoxicating orgasmic experience of love's "delicious poison" (1.5.27) to a religious experience of heaven, in, "Eternity was in our lips and eyes." Perhaps Hippolyta experiences herself as a Fairy Queen, as opposed to a ferocious Amazon, whose "enthralled" eye "doth move [her]" to "swear" love, "on first view" (3.1.132-134) of the "monster" (3.2.6).

For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the "spiritual character" of the "orgiastic emotion" which "has nothing to do with the logic of the patriarchal spirit, but belongs to a specific feminine form of experience often associated with the moon in mythology." (Neumann *Fear* 19). This phenomenon strengthens the Amazon Queen Hippolyta's connection to the moon with her subconscious archetype in the Fairy Queen Titania's sexual nature, as well as that same connection to Queen Cleopatra, as the "great fairy" looking at the same moon. And so, this nostalgic power of Motherlove, or Eros, calls the hero "home" to the maternal matrix, and thereby figures the divine incarnation

of the god-man. Like planets, the hero gravitates toward the attractive pull of the Female force of nature.

Importantly, both sexes must heed this call. Lisa Starks summarizes that “Antony longs to die and be reborn in Cleopatra’s regenerative imagination. If he goes to his death, ‘like a bridegroom’, then, as the regenerative Isis, Queen Cleopatra goes to her death like a virgin bride—or, rather, like *the Virgin Queen*” (*Immortal* 109). Starks sees Cleopatra’s final staged passion with the bleeding, dying Antony as the Christ figure, a powerfully erotic Pieta. Farrell supplies another perspective of Antony “as a nursing babe at the breast of the goddess which makes the apotheosis especially suggestive of a *pieta*” (*Play* 117), as well as Mother Nature. Harpur claims that “women complete the redemptive work of Christ by redeeming the fabric of creation itself—which, as St. Paul writes, ‘groaneth and travaileth’ like the Soul of the World in the coils of matter’s serpent” (148). This imagery places Cleopatra’s “sweating labour” of love for her mystical husband in her sleep-counterfeiting death, as a figure of the Mother of Christ, in the vision of the pieta.

Further, Cleopatra’s body imitates the New Eve’s obedient use of her body as “a vehicle of redemption” in childbearing (Glenn 78; 1Cor. 11.3; Tim. 2.11-15).⁴¹ Hughes agrees that the final double death appears as a pieta of Christ in the arms of his mourning

⁴¹ Jan Kott references the famous 1532 treatise, *Splendor Solis*, which features a hermaphroditic *Discordia Concors* that symbolizes not only man and woman, but also sun and moon, earth and water, beginning and end” (Kott *Shakespeare* 341). The opposites are contained in the figure, but also contained in an “egg of the world” in his-her hand which symbolizes transcendental harmony. He mentions that Leo the Hebrew’s (1530-84) widely known *Dialoghi d’Amore* connected biblical tradition that Adam and Eve were divided as a punishment, with the myth of splitting by Zeus (from the *Symposium*). This early modern work by Leo codified three traditions, Gnostic, Hebrew, and Christian, which means that most of Shakespeare’s audiences believed that redemption would reunite the sexes. Theseus asks how can we make concord of this discord? Antony is equally perplexed about how to resolve the chaos in himself. The queens intuitively act the inner confusion “out” using their main female bargaining tool—sex.

Great Mother, or, “Goddess of Complete Being”, as well as the sacred infant at her breast (319). Here, in what Hughes calls “this most religious of all of Shakespeare’s plays” because of Cleopatra’s divine female force, “divine love redeems him [Antony]” (319). As the Essential Female, Cleopatra bears Antony’s life story, or word of love, as her son, the original Word of Love, to immortality through her own mythopoetic power to bear creation. Thus, Love urges both sexes to relocate themselves in the Great Mother.

In this reading, Shakespeare focuses on the conception, birth, and resurrection of the redemptive Word of Love, in terms of the divine hero’s wife as a mother. In representing *warrior* queens, the playwright reframes Kermode’s traditional male focus on the redemptive male hero who proceeds from the Almighty Father. Instead, Shakespeare addresses the result of the mortal female’s intuitive apprehension and assent to her creator’s will for her life, as redemptive god-bearing Almighty Mother. Similarly, Shakespeare gives his warrior queens free will to choose. Further, Shakespeare’s warrior queens are both from matriarchal societies of slaves and eunuchs. They are slaves of patriarchs, as well as matriarchal owners of eunuchs. Misogynist critics insist that these female Amazons are Other who must be tamed. Feminists argue back that the “enuious” patriarchal males bully them into submission. Shakespeare seems to agree with both.

Having assessed both misogynistic and feminist criticism surrounding feminine mythology in *Antony* and *Midsummer*, I suggest that Schwarz’s explanation resonates most closely with Shakespeare’s position. She explains that the battle will end in a new form of ambiguous domination, when both tyrants fight until they discover that one is, conveniently, female.⁴² In this thesis, I will address the question of who disarms whom in

⁴² For an imaginative study on male bonding of all kinds, see Sedgwick *Between Men* 21.

the discussion on, “what Venus did with Mars”, since that matriarchal theme of feminine power challenges the “constructed and arbitrary Roman favoring of Mars over Venus” (Singh 322). In fact, Adrien Bonjour asserts that Mardian’s comment “proves” the mythological center to *Antony*, and “Shakespeare’s gender-inversion insinuates that Venus is the active agent: she renders him her slave, and, in this, he deftly hints at Cleopatra’s own ‘supremacy’ over Antony” (77). The hero confirms this himself:

Egypt, thou knew’st too well
 My heart was to thy rudder tied by th’strings
 And thou shouldst tow me after. O’er my spirit
 Thy full supremacy thou knew’st, and that
 Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
 Command me. (3. 11. 54-58)

As Venus, the queens personify Love as the force that recognizes itself in the mind’s eye and urges physical reunion after an earthly vision of heaven in the beloved. Schwarz’s “Amazon encounter” overlays Cupid in her modern explanation of how passion similarly disarms reason’s defenses, and the battle of difference and fear of the foreign Other is transformed to the erotic violence of creation. Like Cupid’s golden arrows, Love’s mysterious power transfigures the minds of enemies to change swords of war for kisses of peace. Shakespeare offers the feminine pansy’s love-juice, and its antidote, dianthus, or, “Dian’s bud, o’er Cupid’s flower” (4.1.72), as analogous replacements for Cupid’s masculine arrows of desire and disgust.⁴³ These paradoxical symbols “bring out the inherent irrationality of love as both absurd and wonderful”, like Hippolyta’s “strange and admirable” story of the night (Saccio *Word Part 1* 36). For instance, the Fairy King’s love-juice transformation of Titania might correspond to

⁴³ Olson reiterates that “in the Renaissance, there were two Cupids; one with a bandage over his eyes associated with *Venus Vulgaris* who shot hot darts of irrational, earthly desires, and the other waited upon *Venus Coelestis*, the mother of supernal love” (Olson *Beyond* 60, 106).

Theseus's more militant love-arrow "injuries" to Hippolyta's body. Although both accomplish the same patriarchal control of female sexuality, the earthly might follow the heavenly exchange from masculine arrows to flowery feminine agents of perceptual transformation. Similarly, in Schwarz's Amazon encounter, Shakespeare presents both sexes as warriors, intent on killing, who merge instead into a lover's embrace and take hands in vows of friendship.

In the queens' imaginative message of hope in eternal life, married to Love, Shakespeare alludes to the mysterious Oriental "magi" bearing gifts, as a "wink" to his Christian audience. Instead Antony "hath assembled" the "kings o' th' earth for war;" (3.6.68), in order to similarly martyr himself for love.⁴⁴ Along with Joseph's marginalized role as guardian, like Ouranos to Gaia, this important reference casts the husbands as homagers to the Queen Mother who produces the mortal hero. In an analogous action, Cleopatra figures the Mother of God when she dies and reproduces the hero. She is called, "O Eastern star!" (5.2.307), or Venus, "the morning star", which connotes the goddess of love and signifies the birth of Jesus (Blits *New* 8; Matt. 2:1-2).

In the incarnation, the Word is made flesh (John 1:14), but also renovated in the promise of eternal life in death (Rom. 6:23). In a similar sense, Antony runs to his death as a bridegroom (4.14.100-2), and Cleopatra has "immortal longings" (5.2.280) for "[a] better life" in death (5.2.2). She cries, "Husband, I come" (5.2.286) as a bride, as St. John saw "the holy city, new Jerusalem, come...out of heaven, prepared as a bride trimmed for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). In this "immanent" moment, as in St. Paul's, and St. John's

⁴⁴ Zaleski explains the connection to exotic Egypt, as the Greek, "mageia" or Latin "magia" were members of the hereditary Persian priest class, and, like the Amazon warrior queens, were "admired for their wisdom, and feared for their foreignness" (Zaleski 38).

apprehension, “there is a tendency to conceive of the End as happening at every moment” (Kermode *Sense* 25).⁴⁵ Thus, the local particulars “come” into the eternal story.

Blits suggests that the Roman warring spirit “seems to turn against itself and become spiritualized, replacing pride, honor and victory with humility, abjectness and suffering as the highest good pagan spirit, directed inward and against man” (New 9). Thus, the Essential Female literally contradicts consensus, and develops a new framework which replaces the old Amazon story: dead set against marriage. She civilizes the male hero by physically bringing him into and out of society in a heroic story. Hippolyta is anxious for the moon to change, after the lovers are “eternally knit.” In this thesis, I will provide discussions of this Christian spirit behind the text, based on Kermode’s explanation of how the birth of Christ supplants previous divine myths which fade into the *aevum*.⁴⁶

This mythopoetic fusion of opposites disarms the fear of things unknown, and comforts the hearers, together, like blessed sexual fusion in a marriage. Farrell notes that Shakespeare’s poetry expresses a larger cultural drive “to ground authority in cosmic heroism” which he understands as, “erotic and female, as well as violently masculine” and that “he tries to capture the treacherous vitality released when these different values *come together*” (Play 117). Farrell’s discussion evokes the Amazon encounter and suggests how Shakespeare intermingles gender roles to form one, as in the “treacherous”

⁴⁵ See also Steiner: “Christ’s coming, presence, and return is imminent, and thus brings time to a stop” (*Babel* 158-159).

⁴⁶ St. Thomas gave this necessary idea of a *medium inter aeternitatem et tempus* this name *aevum*. In modern stories, we can hear the disposable, time-bound chatter of the people, but “there is exposed what truly exists in another realm of time, an intemporal sign that may take its part in a pattern that has nothing to do with *chronos*. It is a basic doctrine that the unconscious knows nothing of time. This idea is useful to describe that although the queen be dead, her matriarchal dignity survives, and belongs to the *aevum*.”

merging in the sexual act of natural and paradoxical violence. In this imagery of the Amazon encounter, the fighters regain paradise in the union of contrarities: the fusion of love and death. While there are many contradictory versions of the myth of the female monster, such as the Titaness, Medusa, conquered by the male hero, Hercules, Shakespeare inverts that dynamic. Instead, he represents warrior queens who challenge the gender binaries and represent the other side of the original duality of love's force.

For instance, as previously addressed, Cleopatra calls Antony a "Gorgon" (2.5.117-118), and he calls her his "Serpent of the Nile." While this mirrored imagery strengthens the sense of battle action between monsters, Antony stops struggling against Cleopatra, and she ends the war by speaking his Love-action into the aevum with her final, identical narrative self-sacrifice. In this way, Cleopatra transfigures the monster, Antony, into a god-hero. Similarly, Oberon curses Titania, to "wake when some vile thing is near" (2.2.40). Love amends, or transfigures her lips and eyes to see and say, "What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed?" (3.1.122). She does not see the ass, as he is, or as we in the audience see him. The love-juice helps her imagine him as her heavenly dream-lover, like Hercules, who Hippolyta wakes up to remember as Theseus, and thereby, recreate and surpass, in her long, sunrise speech on the mountaintop.

As Stavig has suggested, then, the marginalized female warrior queen's presence impresses truths which inspire Theseus to abolish the patriarchal law, respect female choice. Hippolyta tells her "story of the night" in five astonishing lines. Similarly, Cleopatra antagonizes Antony in every moment until his death when she sees him as a supernatural lover beyond anything Nature has yet called into being. Once again, Shakespeare's queens create and bear the male heroes' stories as gods. The women

embody *and* absorb the “vile” enemy lovers as reflections of their own masculine personas, as Cleopatra is a, “vile lady” (4.15.22), and a “whore” (4.13.10), and Hippolyta/Titania, a “rash wanton.” (2.1.63)

From another view, Bottom’s “chief humour is for a tyrant: I could play ‘Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split. / The raging rocks / and shivering shocks / Shall break the locks / Of prison gates” (1.2.24-9). Like Queen Omphale, Queen Hippolyta (as the Fairy Queen) transfigures Bottom/Hercules’ characteristic masculine tearing and splitting of “Ercles’ vein, a tyrant’s vein” (1.2.35), into the heroic actions of “A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love” (1.2.20), like Christ, who broke the gates of Hell and Death, and so rejoin heaven and earth. And, similar to Titania, who offers to purge the mortal grossness of the first “vile thing” that comes near her bower, Cleopatra “make[s] defect perfection” when “vilest things / Become themselves in her.” Thus, these blinding erotic battles, or “shivering shocks” dissolve the foreign Other, and reunite enemies who “rock the ground” in love.

The earthly and heavenly weddings in *Midsummer* and *Antony* also illustrate the striking reflexive action that occurs between the earthly queens and the Poet of Heaven. *Midsummer* might be read to end in weddings and comedy, with haunting tragedy just beneath the fairy blessings, while *Antony* might be understood to end in tragedy, with idle games masking the horror of betrayal as a wedding in eternity. Notably, the two queens might even interchange roles, and switch the particular plays’ endings, if Hippolyta slew herself rather than submit to the humiliation of Theseus’ victory parade of marriage, and Cleopatra tossed off the humiliation of Caesar’s triumphal march to live in submissive

obscurity as his property/war trophy. This thought affirms the larger view of Shakespeare's warrior queens as spokespersons for the Great Mother Nature.

The queens' speeches can be played as cunning and resentful, and/or erotic and romantically flirtatious. Whether we read the characters as enemy targets, or as commanders, I will demonstrate how the warrior queens naturally balance reason and imagination to strategize their own positions of power and manipulate their men to action through language. Therefore, it is possible to read their cool coquetry either from the perspective of flirtatious foreplay in consensual, and even loving relationships, as a tactical strategy to sway, or sabotage, the men in power, or even as both. If they do have divine visions, Cleopatra and Hippolyta might humbly sacrifice themselves to play a new role for future peace, or they might simply demur to avoid personal humiliation at a man's hand. Either way, the queens imagine their own endings to their own personal narratives, and return the echo of the universal love story in the original female voice.

In the first scenes of *Antony* and *Midsummer*, both queens suspend the question of love: the optative case of Cleopatra's first conditional word, "If", and Hippolyta's cagey silent treatment. Titania, a sexual war prisoner herself, performs similar silence, which represents her forced sexual compliance. Similarly, Hippolyta's silence mirrors Hermia's condemnation for refusing unwanted sex and marriage. The subjunctive tension of both first scenes exposes the "merry and tragical" (5.1.58) nature of their dramatic relationships, as well as a dark undercurrent of erotic violence running along both sides of the seemingly playful exchanges. The fluid "syntax" of Shakespeare's mythical queens, who represent the Essential Female, remains unfixed and enigmatic throughout both plays. In a similar reading, Steiner observes the energies of his poetry thus:

More than any other human intellect of which we have adequate record, Shakespeare used language in a condition of total possibility. He seems to hear around the core of every word the totality of its overtones and undertones; of its connotations and echoes. Many of his words do not come to rest in any single meaning, but shade, by pun or suggestion of sound, into an area of new definitions. (*Language* 205-6)

Although the queens appear proud, both live at the mercy of men to whom they owe a debt, for which, I suggest, they pay with their lives. Hippolyta is a war trophy, and Cleopatra owes a tax debt to Rome, and pays it with sexual currency to Antony, the “collector.” Hippolyta can only continue living as Theseus’ captive, and Cleopatra can only continue living as Caesar’s captive.

However, I argue that both queens transform tragic self-will to comedy, in marriage, through the act of mythopoesis. I will demonstrate how Cleopatra artfully transforms her tragic condition to comedy in eternal marriage and how Hippolyta plays her position (which is powerful despite the fact that it is one of forced slavery), to ransom Hermia and herself from the tragic law of death, to comedy in married safety. Most significantly, I will consider whether or not Shakespeare’s warrior women experience dream-visions which translate them from masculine aggressors to feminine lovers. Kermode frames the end of the battle when the killer lays down his weapon, and offers to “take hands, if we be friends” (4.1.84), as Puck echoes Hippolyta’s mythopoetic formula for heavenly peace in marriage after a reunion with the maternal matrix. Further, I will advance an argument that both Antony and Cleopatra run to their deaths as female brides on the way to their wedding, as do all of the dazed lovers after their midsummer night’s dream, all saying how “strange and admirable” the story seems.

In these two plays, Shakespeare presents patriarchal authorities in a new key to replace the old stories without diminishing the male contribution to the natural life cycle.

In fact, he even frames the male domination of the female, in the act of love, as a noble and voluntary form of heroic self-sacrifice, or castration of male power, alluding to the commonplace Renaissance pun on “death” for love. In this action, the female possesses the metaphorical phallic sword, and renders the male her powerless love-slave, as in “what Venus did with Mars.” But, from the male’s perspective, for instance, Antony’s opening scene’s optative declaration announces his new attitude in, “Let Rome in Tiber melt” and “kingdoms are clay” (1.1.35-6). In “Here is my space,” Antony relocates his Roman duties and local habitation to the queen of Egypt’s private body (1.1.36). I will illustrate how her feminine power is symbolized by her moving river barge where they “die” together, for the first time, and later, in her solid monument, for the last.

In a symbolically parallel structure, Theseus’ opening lines announce his similar movement toward the family, giving up his life as a notorious abandoner of women when he encounters Hippolyta on the battlefield. He vows to wed her in “another key,” and asks, “What cheer, my love?” which indicates that she might command him, just as Antony asks Cleopatra: “What sport tonight?” (1.1.48). And, analogous to Cleopatra’s barge, Titania’s fertile woodland bower, or “flow’ry bed,” might reveal Hippolyta’s subconscious desires to sexually capture Theseus through female enchantments. Then, Hippolyta might articulate those visions of Theseus, as a lover higher than Hercules, in her prosody on the mountaintop, using the same kind of rhetorical hyperbole that Cleopatra uses when she reveals her dream of her Herculean Antony from her high monument. In these eternal moments of sexual orgasm, Shakespeare locates the stillpoint of creation, before chronological history began, as I will employ Empson’s theory of quantum poetics to explain. Cleopatra states that they touched eternity, in that moment,

and Hippolyta observes that the moment transfigured them, together. In that unexpected experience, Hippolyta's "strange and admirable", and Cleopatra's "strange and terrible" contrarities coexist, like a marriage, compressed into one holy textual figure, or narrative, like the Biblical logos of love, or Hesiod's cosmic origins of the gods.

Research Methods

Frye observes: "If we study only the historical Shakespeare, we take away all his relevance to our own time, and shirk trying to look into the greatest mystery of literature, the mystery of how someone can communicate with times and spaces and cultures so far removed from his own" (*On Shakespeare* 1). Similarly, Blits complains that the study of Shakespeare has been "plagued" by numerous literary theories such as structuralism, poststructuralism, historicism, new historicism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, feminism, pragmatism, cultural materialism, deconstruction, queer theory, Marxist theory, and many more. He asserts: "Whatever their differences, the theories reduce Shakespeare to a mere slave, or spokesman, a product or prisoner of the prejudice, persecution, paranoia, power relations, oppression and state ideology of his own day—simply an Elizabethan Englishman whose work is fully determined by the narrow perspective of his immediate locale and time" (Blits vii). I will offer a complementarists' view to link the common theme of transcendent love in the queens' speeches. Since both use religious terms, I will also consider myth's larger function in the eternal story.

To achieve this aim, I will pay close attention to intertextuality between both plays and their Early Modern source materials, such as the Geneva Bible, Ovid, Plutarch, Hesiod, and Chaucer. I will remember, as Nuttall points out, that "Scholars are not wrong to cite Shakespeare's sources, but sources remain *poetically extraneous*" (*Apotrope* 51).

In other words, Shakespeare's source material is not integral to the universal or essentialist reading of the poetry as one story. Further, the specific mythological references will be there for some audiences and readers, but absent for others, since "some will know more" (Nuttall *Apotrope* 51). The average royal, or groundling, hearing the play "might not even notice the astonishing number of allusions to Geneva Bible, Prayer Book, and general dogma, because they were commonplace; *we* would miss them because religious references are almost completely foreign, like the unfamiliar language" (Bryant 15).

My research methodology also includes the use of Empson's newly recovered typescript, in which he explains his scientific study of Elizabethan spirituality using mythopoetics, or "quantum poetics," in order to explain how characters become something that was not previously there, as both Hippolyta and Cleopatra do. Similarly, I employ a phenomenological methodology in order to provide insight into the spiritual meanings of symbols representing the senses, such as "the poet's eye," as metaphors of experience, and to understand the flow of time as a reference point to mark the continuum of the story as it progresses. My primary critical framework for understanding these two warrior queens is derived from Kathryn Schwartz's idea of the Amazon encounter of erotic violence simplifying *discordia concors*, as depicted in the Renaissance commonplace of Mars and Venus. I will locate that mythopoetic history in the origins of the universe and assign relevance to these warrior queens as female spokespersons for the Great Mother Nature.

Limitations

One of the most difficult challenges associated with this topic of Shakespeare's warrior queens was to define the term "warrior queen", and to explain why I omit Queen Margaret from this study. For the purposes of this thesis, I employ Fraser's definition: "a queen who deploys her country's military resources" (8) Shakespeare's Margaret offers a solid example of Saccio's definition of ambivalence in love, over the four history plays in which she appears, and would provide a natural balance point for Hippolyta's comedy and Cleopatra's tragedy. And Jansen describes Margaret as the "archetypal virago" (qtd. in Holinshed 97). However, Fraser does not include Queen Margaret in her official list of warriors since she was a queen-consort who fought on behalf of her husband rather than functioning as a full, reigning queen. Therefore, I will delimit the focus of this thesis to two warrior queens: Cleopatra and Hippolyta. I will also include discussions of Titania, who suggests Hippolyta's subconscious dream visions of sexuality, as well as the ancient matriarchal rule, and suppression, to reflect Hippolyta's earthly plight.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ For more on the corresponding psychological relationships linking the cosmic and the mundane, see Saccio *Word Pt. 1*, 39.

Definition of Terms

The terms defined below will provide context for my argument concerning the way language civilizes the masculine tragedy and creates new play endings.

Allegory: On the question of real and mythical Amazon characters, Garber suggests that “Cleopatra herself is an allegory [. . .] not merely, and, perhaps not ultimately, a historical personage, or even a dramatic character,” but “the stuff of legend” (*Fatal* 259). This means that she is a character who has located and named her essence outside of her embodied time and space, to live forever in our minds as the unique and paradoxical spirit of Shakespeare’s warrior queen. In the root, “*leg*”, the poet confirms her as a literary creation.

A crocodile is just “like itself” and “the elements once out of it, it transmigrates” (2.7.42-46). The allegorical figure “crosses a boundary” or “moves to a new area,” with a similar function as understood in the literary terms of “metaphor” and “translate.” Cleopatra leaves her elements to baser life, as she, too, rises to a new life in a new life. Garber mentions that the Nile crocodile is associated with Isis, “which transmigrates into allegory” (Garber *Fatal* 259). Cleopatra considers herself an incarnation of Isis (3.6.17), as well as the Serpent of the Nile. And, like the crocodile, she empties herself of elements as a literary character, and thus, never dies. She is therefore, “unreadable” and cannot be understood, or legitimized under anyone else’s fixed law, except her own.

Ambiguity: The Latin root of “ambiguity” comes from *agere*, to “act,” as it derives from the verb *ambigere*, to “wander” and *ambi* “around.” Ambiguity results in the sense of two or more meanings, and “moving from place to place, or side to side in a

dubious manner” (Buccola *Fairies* 40). Empson defines ambiguity as the location, “where two systems of judgment are forced into open conflict before the reader” (*Ambiguity* 255). For an example, “will” is an ambiguous word in Shakespeare’s oeuvre. Its connotations range from the sense of power given by God’s grace to do good, as the Church of England’s 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*, Article X defines it,⁴⁸ to the sexual sense manifested in human desire, or even the actual genital organs themselves. This word contains and consolidates reason and desire: “This type of ambiguity is of special importance not only because of the degree of ‘compaction’ to be observed in the relation of the opposites, but because it represents somehow the deepest poetry, or the secret places of the Muse” (Empson *Spirits* 192).

Similarly, “serve” is an ambiguous term in Shakespearean usage, which can mean both to sexually abuse, and to offer duty. However, Shakespeare clearly demonstrates that living a life of service and dying for a royal empress—as represented by Iras and Charmian, Hippolyta’s army, Titania’s votaress, and Hermia’s initial choice over “yielding her virgin patent up” (1.1.80) to a lover she did not choose—can function as a triumph of female choice. Flashes of murderous passion and careful reasoning characterize the warrior queen. There is an element of natural torture to Cleopatra’s rhetorical, “Not know me yet?” line, which evokes an image of her standing over a wounded rival after a battle, and gloating, as a victorious general (3.8.158). And, ironically, Hippolyta’s impossible-to-read silence seems to have the same effect on her so-called conqueror, Theseus. Therefore, The Essential Female is an enigma—a human and allegorical question mark that faces both ways.

⁴⁸ “We have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we might have good will.”

Ambivalence: As Rossiter suggests, “Shakespeare’s view is double-eyed ambivalence: it faces both ways” (*Ambivalence* 292). And, like its personified allegorical symbols—the female gorgon, Medusa, and Cupid—Love’s mysterious power cannot be understood, controlled, or contained, and it will always reign despite human political constructions and attempts to minimize, rationalize, or rule it. Thus, analogous to both allegorical queens, Cupid is simultaneously a charming cherub and deadly archer. I will use the word ambivalence to describe the physical, verbal, and psychological, back and forth movements between the queens and their lovers. These movements demonstrate the thematic interplay between the court and the wood, dry sunlight and misty moonlight, and male authority and female choice.

The analogues move within both plays from lovers’ quarrels and conflicts in the opening scenes, to chaos in the dream world of shifting symbolic battles, and back to contained constancy in marriage or death. Cleopatra, the queen of “infinite variety”, somehow makes satisfied appetites hungry (2.2.244-245), and “even the priests find her sanctified when she’s lewdly vamping herself about” (Saccio *Word Part 2* 79). This image of desire-clouded minds speaking and acting out irrational and opposite beliefs, even in holy men, demonstrates Shakespeare’s theme that the paradoxical nature of love is its constant flux.

Like the Fairy Queen, Titania, the “great fairy,” Cleopatra, devotes her intelligence and energy to cultivating those wily arts by which she can impose her interests upon the world, and “twist its great men around her fingers” (Markels 46). As well as the double vision of Cupid and Harmony, they are both referred to as Circe and Venus: a sex witch and a love goddess—both beautiful, controlling, lustful, and feared by

men. In the mythopoetical view, Shakespeare suggests: “Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both” (2.1.22). Saccio points out that, in the word “let,” Shakespeare employs the optative case to highlight desired transformation or dream: the atmosphere of imaginative rhetoric. Cleopatra uses rhetorical directives to command the universe like a ruthless warrior: “Melt Egypt into Nile” (2.5.79) and “O sun, / Burn the great sphere thou mov’st in” (4.16.11).

Antony’s soft optative, however, evokes the language of supplication. “Let Rome in Tiber melt” recalls a benediction or blessing, such as, “May you find peace.” Antony begs Cleopatra to stop fighting—“Now for love of Love and her soft hours” (1.1.46)—which mirrors the phrase “For the love of God.” Theseus might similarly ask forgiveness for his “injuries” against love, which he promises to amend, or legitimize, in proper marriage. Blits notes that “despite having won Hippolyta through conquest, Theseus ‘Now’ eagerly awaits his wedding day. In place of rape, he anticipates merriment and mirth, in sharp contrast to his heroic, warrior past, brute force has given way to love and law. “His sexual desire has become civilized, or tamed” (*Soul* 20). Thus, Love exposes the feminine as the taming force to civilize the most hardened warrior of either sex.

Analogue: Shakespeare’s “ ‘wavelength’ for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is analogue—that everything is double” (Saccio *Word Part I* 25). Like parallel plot lines, the literary device of analogue connects similar situations in different characters and/or plays, such as Ovid’s “Venus and Mars”, and “Pyramus and Thisbe”, and unifies them through analogue. For example, *Midsummer* includes three different human couples, one mythological pair, one fairy pair, the ancient fable pair, plus the live audience. Shakespeare uses the classical Ovidian story of the ancient Roman gods, Venus and

Mars, as analogous to the relationship to the Athenian Duke, Theseus, and his Amazon war trophy, Hippolyta. Working from that familiar dynamic, Shakespeare translates the royal human pair into medievalized versions of Chaucer's, "The Knight's Tale", and makes their love story a daytime, city view of the woodland love-spirits, Oberon and Titania, warring by moonlight. Shakespeare shows that the four young Athenian lovers are every bit as irrational and unreasonable as the royals, *and* the ancient Greek tragic lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe. Shakespeare holds the umbrella analogue of Gaia and Ouranos, Adam and Eve, God and His Mother, and Mars and Venus over both particular queens, and their lovers, to show that every creature is subject to the same eternal story.

Archetype/Character: Gerard Else explains that "poetics abstract the whole of imaginative literature into the ritual course of events which celebrate the cycle of one archetypal hero" (Else 256). Samuel Johnson observed: "In the writings of other poets, a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species." (7:62). Garber notes that "Shakespeare's characters transcend the time-bound and the temporary. They are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find" (*Fatal* 263). It is who is *always* there, doing what *always* happens, to echo Auden.⁴⁹ The etymology comes from a brand, stamp, or seal of a letter or symbol. So, a character indicates a particular person whose seal has become a commonplace, such as, "Titania is Mother Nature", or, "Hippolyta is *Venus Armata*." Thus, the *dramatis personae* indicates real people who represent the imagined

⁴⁹ The understanding of character as personal traits came from Dryden's 1660s essays, which began by connecting letters with Galen's ancient studies (129 A.D.) of the physical humours, as general types, or mental dispositions (Garber *Profiling* 253).

memories of historical heroes or fictive allegories of moral virtues or vices, as literary symbols or stamped letters.

The playwright uses his masked voices to “make” his art, or *poesis*. Thus, the poet’s characters’ characters, or “personifications” in words, seal the truth he apprehends from the universal memory as living poems, drawing the truths, or “muthos” forward in time as literal and literary figures of speech. For example, Shakespeare’s lovers recall the even larger and older cosmic allegorical figures of Mars and Venus, the Renaissance commonplace erotic argument between Love and War. So, with this literary progression of character from temperamental cosmic forces located and named, as dispositional humours, we understand the ambiguity of character in human nature to contain two “equal and opposite connotations” (Garber *Profiling* 253). So, as a poet, the living actor translates the markings on his script—which indicate the ancient, allegorical forms he must interpret, locate, name, revise, update, and reenact—for his contemporaries.

The paradoxical and simultaneous boundary between *who* one is, and *what* one represents, acts, or personifies is ambiguous. I posit that Shakespeare erases those barriers. The ancient, fictive speech-acts of muthos translate themselves, or “carry across” time and space, and we recognize our own paradoxical selves in the actors who simultaneously play us. Thus, Shakespeare’s actor is a poet as well as a poem: a living “artisan” engraved with the once and future “breaking news” of reality in his or her figures of speech. In this mythical spirit, Knight calls Cleopatra “Shakespeare’s most amazing and dazzling single personification,” with “all qualities potential in her” (Knight *Diadem* 289). She is not one character but many: “She is at once Rosalind, Beatrice, Ophelia, Gertrude, Cressida, Desdemona, Cordelia, and Lady Macbeth” (290). Kermode

dubs Queen Cleopatra “the greatest of Shakespeare’s female characterizations” (Kermode 1394). And Hippolyta is all militant matriarchs, as well as the supernatural Mother Nature of Titania.

Complementarity: Rabkin considers complementarity: “Shakespeare’s most characteristic feature throughout the canon”, and defines it as, “an approach to experience in which radically opposed and equally total commitments to the meaning of life coexist in one harmonious vision” (*Problem* 113).

Discordia Concors: Waddington explains that “The dominant Renaissance interpretation regarded the legend of Mars and Venus as embodying the profoundly significant concept of *concordia discors*” (223). Believers define this theory by suggesting that “the world maintains order and form through the mediation attained by the tension between two opposed principles” (223).⁵⁰ The scientific law extends to a metaphorical reading of the myth around the planets which bear the lovers’ names. He explains that the *concordia discors* effected through Venus’s moderation of Mars is symbolized by their lovechild, Harmony (223).⁵¹

Regarding *Discordia concors* in *Antony*, J. Hall concludes that “It is left to Cleopatra to reestablish a strong, unified image of the hero from two violent extremes to a ‘heavenly mingle’” (I. v. 59) (109). This corresponds to Hippolyta’s “eternally knit” marriage with Theseus. Gohlke uses the mythopoetic term “conception,” which implies both motherhood and imagination: “If Antony lives in our imagination, it is because of her ‘conception’ of him” (160). Goddard suggest that “The play illustrates a *discordia*

⁵⁰ Waddington cites Heraclitus, the Pythagoreans, Anaxagoras, Aristotle, and Plato as believers.

⁵¹ See also Plutarch’s *Moralia* in Wind 87 and McAlindon’s *Decorum* 195.

*concor*s theme: the imagination bringing harmony out of its chaos of “incongruities, anachronisms, contradictions, and impossible juxtapositions” (*Vol I* 76).

Dream: On interpreting dreams, Calderwood asserts:

Only masters of the poetic language can both word and reword the matter of the Female which seems airy nothing to Theseus. Shakespeare translates the incommunicable, subjective dimension of human experience, of which dream is the emblem, into external dramatic form where it can be publicly available. The experience in which all participate is the text which becomes a kind of secular ritual of communion. The play is the focal illusion whose existence and significance are created by a collective imaginative act and whose value lies in the fact that it enables a sharing of inner experience otherwise inaccessible. (*Illusion* 519)

The theatrical illusion contains a similar wedding of imaginations. In this sense, drama, far from being airy nothing, actually imposes its most rare vision on the world of hard realities. For instance, Christ’s death is contained in the story of his destruction of death. Shakespeare makes a farce of *Pyramus and Thisbe* to blur the intensity of separation, and he softens Cleopatra’s death with the Clown. For interpreters, Kermode points out that it is Hippolyta’s doubts (5.1.23-27) that serve to question this “prince of the world” who has “got it wrong” (*Language* 63). Theseus speaks of the *fantasies* of the lunatic, lover, and poet as matters “in a *mystery*,” “which none of the princes of the world know” (I Cor. 2:7). And so, it falls to the female to interpret the spiritual realm.

Eternal Moment: I employ the term “eternal moment” as the imaginative leap that connects all things to each other in time and space, and to the original force of love. Analogous to Theseus’s first word, “Now,” which focuses his desire for Hippolyta, Antony counsels his “wrangling queen” (1.1.60) to ignore the ambassadors: “Now, for the love of Love and her soft hours, / Let’s not confound the time with conference harsh: / There’s not a minute of our lives should stretch / Without some pleasure now” (1.1.54-58). He also implies that we touch the creator of all that is “noble” when we “do thus”

(1.1.44). Antony's decision "to do thus", in embracing Cleopatra, as the "nobleness of life" (4.14.102), has its parallel in his sword's stroke of "love" in "nobleness." (4.4.99). These images suggest the temporal horizontal "in and out" of piercing swords, dolphins, phalluses, babies, and words, as vehicles which *lift* eyes and bodies, vertically, to experiences of eternal heaven in the motion of the poet's eye and pen.

Shakespeare presents this concept in Hippolyta's, "transfigured so, together" which occurs as she tries to describe her dreamy experience of love's "strange and admirable" force. Similarly, Goddard points out that Cleopatra's statement—"Eternity was in our lips and eyes"—strikes us as "a genuine perception of the divine element in love—insight into the heart of something which their wildest words about each other are rapturous attempts to express. In such poetry as Cleopatra attains, in those three lines, the illusion becomes almost indistinguishable from the truth" (Goddard *Vol II* 582). In other words, imagination, or passionate desire, creates a new reality for the lovers, as they *become* divine love, rather than merely affect the postures of divine lovers. This atmospheric scene-shift attests to the creative power of Cleopatra's poetry.

However, the most profound parallel to Hippolyta's transfiguration, is Cleopatra's final scene, in which the queen stages herself, as Christ, as she had staged Antony in his hauling up "crucifixion" scene. Her metaphors envision her up and out of reach: "Rather make my country's high pyramides my gibbet / and hang me up in chains!" (5.2.60-62). In word and deed, Cleopatra hoists up Antony, and then herself, rather than let Caesar "hoist me up and show me to the shouting varlotry of censuring Rome" (5.2.55-57). Lyons explains that the typical action is marriage, in the dramatic poem, and usually results in a sense of triumph of human love: "In a great simplification, that ambiguity

seems to pose a basic paradox: Love is the source of integration and disintegration, the promise of immortality and the loss of self” (Lyons *Ambiguity* 15). Weddings and funerals both contain and shape this extraordinary moment of stillpoint in images of sexual climax and death. Immortality, in eternity, is often apprehended in that moment of ecstatic communion, as a vision of the divine wedding as a reunion in death. The sexual pun on “death” carries both ritual “solemnities” as simultaneous separation and reunion with the divine.

T. S. Eliot described the experience of poesis as an encounter with the eternal: “There is an analogy between mystical experience and the way in which poetry is written. At these moments, of process, a burden of anxiety and fear is suddenly lifted, and strong, habitual barriers are broken down, whereas mystical illumination is a vision which when it is past cannot be communicated clearly” (Eliot *Selected* 59). In *Midsummer* and *Antony*, this confusion occurs following the queens’ visions, as well as changes in their habitual warrior defenses which further confirm the mystical events. Eliot also describes the elusive flash of receiving these visions: “It is a function of art, beyond the nameable, classifiable motives of our conscious life, there is a fringe of indefinite extent which we can only detect out of the corner of our eye” (*Selected* 79).⁵²

Foreign Other: Both Hippolyta and Cleopatra operate as exotic foreigners. These “women,” who are actually cross-dressed boy actors, appear “symbolically central,” but, “socially peripheral” (Eggert 139). They are actually silent and invisible, since there is nothing of woman under those costumes. In a visual sleight-of-hand, the transient fairy queen whom Theseus describes as an “airy nothing” might serve as a speaking picture for

⁵² See also Chesterton 21.

the invisible, unvoiced, and uncharacterized women and children in the system. “The Cleopatra who could make a gap in nature could not be adequately embodied by a squeaking boy, and yet it is that unrepresentable Cleopatra who speaks through the squeaking boy to refuse his representation of Other” (Cook 252).

J. Hall suggests that: “Like the player, Cleopatra is able to elude seemingly fixed hierarchies, social and sexual,” and “her subversiveness may be tied to her protean and linguistic skill” (167-8). Enobarbus is speechless, “For her own person, / It beggar’d all description” (2.2.205), Antony is baffled, “She is cunning past man’s thought,” and Theseus cannot interpret Hippolyta, “What cheer, my love?” J. Hall joins fellow feminists, Cook, Cixous, and Clément, who theorize how women might similarly be “cut free from phallogentric discourse” (J. Hall 168). Conversely, cultural materialist Belsey (1985) argues that, whether or not she distracts the men on the surface, Cleopatra does not escape their deep system (*Identity* 191). For the purposes of this thesis, I will consider how the feminine summer melts the masculine winter in both sexes, and thus dissolves the Other in peace.

Functional Shift: One of Shakespeare’s grammatical inventions, functional shift is the device by which the noun turns to a verb. For instance, Cleopatra “words” both Antony and Caesar, and Caesar tries to “boy” her greatness (5.2.191), or sexually degrade her female authority. These particular choices illuminate the gendered fight for final narrative power.

Heroic Excess: *Antony and Cleopatra* is preeminently about heroic, or, “immoderate excess,” or “hyperbole” (Adelman *Liar* 121). Adelman contends that “Antony’s folly and his grandeur have their literary roots in his great ancestor, Hercules”

(135), and Plutarch records Theseus's excesses, as well as his relation to Hercules.

Fawcner suggests that Shakespeare might define folly as "the all-pervasive energy of life itself, the protean thrust that is directly affirmed in the possibilities inherent in corporeal being and natural existence, and sexuality is the very enabling mechanism of this credo." (99). These excesses physically demonstrate Antony's larger-than-life human being.

Thus, the flaw in the human cannot be distinguished from heroic sovereignty" and sexual bliss, "causes human magnitude to expand into the sphere of divine suggestion" (99-100).

Hyperbole: Puttenham calls this figure "the loud lyer" (191). The Greek term *hyperbole* means "a throwing beyond, an overshooting, superiority, excess in anything" (Liddell-Scott Dictionary). In reference to *Midsummer*, Coleridge called the style "feliciter audax", or, "felicitously bold, or audacious" (*Midsummer* 86). Coleridge's definition of hyperbole is fitting for Cleopatra, as well as "proud Titania", the bold voice of Hippolyta. Auden observes that the lovers' hyperbolic rhetoric in the first scene of *Antony* (1.1.14-17), when Antony returns from battle (4.8.13-18), and Antony's death (4.15.63-68), for example, serves "to create feelings of love about which they are in doubt" (Auden 238). This kind of speech is meant to prove their self-importance and "overreach," or overwrite, fear of death and humiliation.

Adelman points out that: "*Antony and Cleopatra* insists that we take the lovers simultaneously as very mortal characters and as gigantic semidivine figures" (*Liar* 11), which is illustrated by Cleopatra's use of figurative language:

It's past the size of dreaming
Nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms *with* Fancy; yet t' imagine
An Antony were nature's piece '*gainst* fancy
Condemning shadows quite. (5.2.97-99)

Cleopatra describes how “strange forms” of “fancy” try to force themselves “past the size of dreaming”, and therefore beyond the bounds of mere “Nature.” It shows feminine Nature as, “cunning past man’s thought.” Cleopatra therefore connects with Antony in death—she announces a new reality in hyperbole.

In terms of divine hyperbole, Mary is lauded as, “more spacious than the heavens”, “higher than the mind can climb,” and, “star who makes the sun appear” (Ware, *Festal Menaion* 454, 459). The language describes the mortal girl as the Mother of God. The use of hyperbole makes it clear that this force of nature is beyond any form humans can grasp. The text explains that through bearing the Word in obedience to her nature, or the will of God, Mary “becomes” the Mother of God. Later, she is caught up into the clouds with her Son, and Father, and the story of her “yes” is immortalized into allegory, as she “becomes” the Eternal Female. Titania is also another name for the moon, which also might receive those descriptions, as creator of the seasons, and new life in the tidal female cycle. Thus, Hippolyta links to Cleopatra, the “Eastern Star” (5.2.308), and “Venus” (2.2.207).

The OED defines “o’erpicturing”, or, “overpicturing”: “To represent or picture in excess of reality; to depict or describe with exaggeration” (Deats 299). Tassi asserts that “Shakespeare calls attention to the imaginative function of *picturing* as a way of knowing character” (Tassi 297). In this way, we can “know” Cleopatra as a divine warrior of heroic excess through hyperbole. In his barge description, Shakespeare sets up the final scene in the play, where the living Cleopatra outdoes, transcends, or, “beggar’d all description,” and thus, replaces all previous imaginings of the love-goddess.

Imagination: In 1588, George Puttenham described imagination as: “The representer of the best, most comely and bewtifull images or appearances of things to the soul according to their very truth. Contemplation of the soul’s truth is the operation of the intellect” (Puttenham 89). According to Frye, “Imagination is the combination of emotion and intellect” or passion *and* reason (*Imagination* 135). When Shakespeare wrote *Midsummer*, the word “imagination” was a pejorative term, and Nuttall points out that, even today, “imaginary” is the natural antithesis of “true” (*Thinker* 124). However, for the Romantics, “it was a term to be revered”, and in this play, it is possible to read imagination as a “glowing reality” (125), or even a flash of brilliant stillpoint.

Bloom notes that, while “imagination” was most closely associated with “fantasy” in Shakespearean times, the poet employed it in its later High Romantic sense (*Ages* xi). For Theseus, “strong imagination” is a trickster, responsible for “shaping fantasies”, but Hippolyta hints at “a more poetic apprehension” in her five-line response to his bluster (Bloom *Ages* xi, xii). Berry explains this ability “to *mediate* between matter and spirit, or intellect, as a part of the soul’s image-making faculty (Berry 144). In other words, the imagination is a special power that the soul uses to apprehend images between earth (matter), and heaven (spirit); that faculty then locates and names these images in language to share with others. This is the poet’s role. Imagination is a function of the soul’s divine energy, as Christ also mediates between heaven and earth as a literary vision of love.

Metaphor: Aristotle suggests that, of all literary devices, “much the most important is the metaphor, and its use is the sign of genius, for to use metaphors well is to see resemblance” (Traci 160). Frye notes that: “The basis of poetic language is the

metaphor, which in its radical form, is a statement of identity: ‘this is that.’ For the Romantic critic, the identification in the metaphor is ideal: two images are identified within the mind of the creating poet to produce, ‘a suggestive magic’” (*Fables* 136, 33). Importantly, Frye suggests that poetry works an important kind of religious magic in its creative energies: “Magic attempts to repeat, on a human level, and in a human context, the kind of power ascribed to God in Hebrew religion and elsewhere. God speaks, and the forms of creation are called into being: the magician utters spells and the spirits of nature are compelled to obey.” (Frye *Natural* 59-60). Drama gets back the magic it renounces by using words to imaginatively assimilate it into the human world through metaphor and simile.

In other words, metaphor moves through the deep poetry of the imagination, whereas simile connects the natural world to the human experience through reason. Frye notes that “metaphor is at its clearest in mythology, where we have gods conceived as human in form and yet identified with various aspects of nature” (*Natural* 60).

Myth: Frye notes that the modern sense and usage of the word myth refers to something untrue, which he considers “a debasement of language” (*Imagination* 111). As I addressed previously, the ancient Greek root, “muthos” means “the truth.” From that perspective, universalist theorist Joseph Campbell claims that:

Myths reflect certain irreducible psychological problems inherent in the very biology of our species, which have remained constant, and have, consequently, so tended to control and structure the myths and rites in their service that, in spite of all the differences that have been stressed by sociologists and historians, there run through the myths of all mankind the common strains of a single symphony of the soul. (Campbell 141)

Bill Moyers points out that what begins as a crowd becomes a society; poem, poet, and public interact to produce a new and living organism” (Moyers xiii). According to

Auden, “There is one God whose will does not change, and people must either establish a new relation to God, or put a distorted relation right—then the autonomous gods of polytheism become subsidiary myths and no longer ground our existence. The birth of Christ makes the gods dumb.” (Auden 55)⁵³ When he writes, “Myths present an analogous *fusion* of accident and substance”, he might refer to Dante’s apprehension of divine love in Paradise as, “ingathered, bound by love in one volume, / the scattered leaves of all the universe; /...substance and accidents and their relations, as though together / fused, after such fashion that what I tell of is one simple flame.” (Auden 55-6) This correlates to the Egyptian soothsayer’s “infinite book of secrecy”, (I. ii. 10) and Antony’s “chronicle” which demonstrates “universal applicability”, as Steiner, Graves, and Adelman posit. “In *Midsummer*, mythological characters are used to determine certain universal experiences that we cannot control” (Auden 56), such as love and death.

Hughes defines myth as an element in a literary work which “operates as a controlling patterned field of force, open internally to the divine, or the supernatural, of which the constituent myths were the original symbolic expression. It also operates externally to the profane, physical form and individualities of the action, to the words of the actors, and the local habitation and burden of the plot” (Hughes 3). In *Antony* and *Midsummer*, the warrior queens, similarly “present their bodies as living sacrifices” in the spirit of Christian humility (Rom. 12:1). Thus, Shakespeare gives ultimate power to his matriarchal warrior queens, as the embodied Word of the divine, to reorder society.

⁵³ Frye notes that Christmas Eve was a beneficent time, when evil spirits had no power; St. John’s Eve, was perhaps more ambiguous, and thus, the phrase, “midsummer madness” on the opposite end of the year, when spirits of nature whether benevolent or malignant might be abroad.” (*The Bottomless Dream* in Bloom’s *Modern Critical Interpretations* 1987) And Kermode claims, “The defeat of Antony and Cleopatra was as necessary as the silencing of the pagan oracles, to replace the Roman gods by Christ.” (*Language* 220)

Hippolyta submits to marry the Duke. Also “eternally knit”, Cleopatra dies, speaking herself into endless marital bliss with her god. They accomplish this constancy by challenging male authority, which creates the necessary chaos to incite creative desire. In this universal process, Shakespeare recalls and retells the myths, especially his version of “what Venus did with Mars”, and “How Queen Omphale tamed the rage of Hercules”, in his stories, and features his warrior queens as mythmakers.

Mythopoetics: “Muthos” means “true story” and “poeia” or “making” describes the synthesis of figures in both language and bodies after visions of heaven come to the noetic eyes of earthly poets. Frye also calls the art form, “Poetic mythology.” He describes the literary phenomenon of naming and locating immediate mortal characters in the deathless eternal cycle, such as Hippolyta as the figure of Venus, the moon, Diana, Circe, and the Serpent of the Nile, and both warrior queens as the Eternal Mother and the Queen of Heaven. Frye defines the term as, “the concrete, sensational, figurative, anthropomorphic basis out of which the informing concepts of discursive thought come” (*Fables* 58). As we have said, poetry seeks the typical and recurring, and thus, is usually organized around the natural cycle of the physical world. Symbols such as floods, serpents, seasons, fertility, love and death represent the events and forces within the limits of the upper world, such as the moon. Through this literary device and “strong imagination” Shakespeare’s Amazon warrior queens link divine “airy nothings” to “Nilus’ slime” in the female womb, barge, monument, and mountaintop of creation, as the Mother of God did in the Annunciation, mirroring the ancient mythical Mother Nature, Gaia, in the eternal story of creation.

In the spirit of mythopoetics, or quantum poetics, Bryant posits that “Hippolyta accepts the story not because the lovers’ reports agree, but because the whole story, told over as one, has the individual vitality to assume *a life of its own*, and grow to something of great constancy, however marvelous, and command belief in a way that Theseus’s poetry never could” (3) because it cannot apprehend the divine. Through her words, Hippolyta’s dream becomes the “truth itself,” the “real, vital and efficacious” story which is poetry” (Bryant 4). This reading of human perception can hold true whether the hearer is Christian or not. Comprehension calls on a faculty which reasons, and orders, the “this” or “that” of created things, and apprehension is a capacity to imagine the creator. This same phenomenon holds true for Cleopatra’s dream of Antony.

The pompous Duke rejects the story he cannot comprehend as the ravings of a madman or a poet; however, his explanation actually affirms the poet’s process as an act which translates that vision of the divine, to the human level, into concrete terms for popular consumption—like plays. At the same time, the poet also translates the human to the divine, as a reflected literary image of either Christ, the incarnate creator of the universe as the Word, or the secular idea of the creator of the universe as a “logical” scientific principle of reason and creative order. Both name the female force as the creative spiritual link between energy and matter. It seems plausible that Shakespeare provides for both answers as the constant, or true story, and both sexes must find their way back to, and toward, this truth. In their speeches, Queen Cleopatra follows the Mother of God’s anguish in the crucifixion and death of her “baby”, “Lord”, and “husband”, in Antony’s death, but claims the resurrection and divine communion after her Dormition, when she “looks like sleep.” And, in the “pomp” and “revelry”, Queen

Hippolyta joins in the wedding imagery of the church militant, as well as “eternally knit” in the church triumphant, as the marriage supper of the Lamb in *Revelation* promises.

As for the spiritual practice of mythopoetics, “if we hear the same sense of reality in reading the *Commedia*, as we do reading *War and Peace*, then we are reading with both eyes—we are properly perceiving the literal double-vision of universal poetry as both a book of divine symbols, and of Scripture which is God’s use of history to reveal his way for mankind” (Bryant 6). In other words, Shakespeare recycles or makes use of the literal symbols named and located in the Bible and imagines them as allegories of the greater principles they represent, like Love and Death: represented as desire, whores in Babylon, serpents, night, and rebirth. Thus, in Shakespeare’s poetry, essential life mysteries take on human characteristics and amuse, rather than frighten the audience. Through this mythopoetic process, we are able to imagine an Amazon queen’s wedding celebration as a comedy, and Cleopatra is able to make us laugh while she kills herself. The tragedy in both stories is connected with the resurrectional themes of renewal and rebirth in constant, New Testament love.

Shakespeare’s general truths, such as Love and Death, are contained in fables, like the story of Mars and Venus, and then in playtexts, with characters like Theseus and Hippolyta, Titania and Oberon, and Antony and Cleopatra. Christians can read an overlay of feminine repentance and humble self-sacrifice in the *four* previously confused masculine warriors. Feminists might consider their agendas of patriarchal tyranny, while misogynists might reassert the sexually unruly female as a monster requiring restraint or annihilation. While there are unlimited combinations and permutations within the many

ancient, traditional, and modern critical lenses, this thesis will focus on the way the women's words apprehend a vision of "something of great constancy."

Aquinas understood Dante's reasoning of the literal sense as "that which is figured by the text" such as, "God's arm" as divine "operative power" (Bryant 7). Extended for our purposes, Shakespeare's "poet's pen" is the creative process, not the quill he used to ink characters onto parchment.⁵⁴ Thus, in Bryant's view, like Aquinas and Dante before him, Shakespeare demonstrates that the crux of the matter is in the relationship *between* these two ways of reading—between reason and imagination. And further, Bryant explains, "the literal meaning, exists in time, or which *is* time—history itself" (7). At the other end, is the unbounded infinite Logos that transcends time. Allegory conjoins the temporal to the eternal in the figures of Shakespeare's lovers.

So, without the allegory of the divine Father manifesting itself in time as the Word made flesh, time or history would remain insignificant. In mythopoetics, the old law can be discarded as the New Testament love story absorbs it. In the mythopoetic effort, T. S. Eliot asserts, "Shakespeare and Dante divide Western literature between them. There is no third" (qtd. in Steiner *Language* 200). As a reflection of the truth, "Allegory is the center for all we know or can ever know as human beings" about the divine, "which even as yet we see but as in the dark surface of an ancient mirror" (Bryant 8; 1Cor. 13:12).⁵⁵ Thus, when two independent Amazon warrior queens seem uncertain, and make unexpected life choices, such as marriage and death for the love of men, it is worth

⁵⁵ See also Steiner: "Our speech interposes itself between apprehension and truth, like a dusty pane or warped mirror. The tongue of Eden was like a flawless glass; a light of total understanding streamed through it. Adam had been driven from the garden; now men were harried, like yelping dogs" (*Babel* 61). This recalls Shakespeare's mountaintop imagery where Hippolyta suddenly hears the dogs "in one mutual cry."

looking for clues as to what might have happened to them. By their confusion, “dreamy” speech, and uncharacteristic following actions, it seems plausible that the queens’ visions of love inform their decisions to marry, in Hippolyta’s case; and die, in Cleopatra’s.

Simone Weil, and many others, observe that prayer and poetry become each other. Matthew Arnold describes the two concepts as identical twins, functioning seamlessly, as one expression, with common origins in the 2nd Millennium BCE. Thus, the literal “level” of any piece of writing can be measured by how much the “spirit giveth life” in one of the periods when belief and acceptance of these principles was “common as bread” (qtd in Bryant 9-10). Nina Auerbach suggests that this conception of Christ, as the center of every piece of literature, makes any other horizontal mentality, or mystical application, such as the myths of classical antiquity, “completely alien” (qtd in Bryant 10). She goes on to say that the Christian approach “annihilated that mentality down to the very structure of its language, which –with all of its ingenious and nicely shaded conjunctions, its wealth of devices, became wholly superfluous as soon as earthly relations of place and time ceased to matter, as soon as a vertical connection, ascending from all that happens, converging in God, alone became significant.” (Bryant 11) Thus, since the beginning of creation, then, all horizontal connections must point *up*, linking the essential story to a common spiritual source of meaning in God, the original Word.

So, whatever else they may be, Shakespeare's plays are fundamentally developments of the great archetypal myths of the human race...participating by analogy in an action which, from the poet’s point of view, is Christian, divine, and eternal” (Bryant 225). Plutarch’s Cleopatra and the Mars and Venus myth are examples of these participatory myths. After Shakespeare applies the shaping power of Christian typology,

they are “transfigured so together” in new, “strange and admirable” ways. As Bryant notes, when we remember that “[Shakespeare’s] audience understood that everything in Scripture has one subject only—the eternal presence revealed to full capacity of human understanding only once in history—then we can begin to understand why a Scriptural reference in Shakespeare often seems to take control when it appears, and sometimes the entire play” (17).

Similarly, Sir Philip Sidney celebrates poets for going beyond mimesis, or a strict imitation of nature. Through the “vigor of his invention”, or “mythopoetics”, Shakespeare the poet is able to bring forth “forms such as never were in nature” (Sidney *Prose* 8). For example, Cleopatra’s inventive memorial brings forth a Colossus to represent her actual earthly lover. In this speech, Shakespeare shows that people need to imagine, remember, revise, refigure, resize, revalue, or mythologize the facts, but “this need not be called a falsifying of reality. Rather, the products of the imagination, as art, may more fully express or bring into being the rich potential of nature itself” (J. Hall 142-3).

In this way, Cleopatra brings forth a new dimension of nature which is true for her, and, as Ornstein speculates, might very well be “a clue to a fundamental reality of all experience” (Ornstein 46). Cleopatra also “makes defect perfection,” and Hippolyta’s analogous message of mystical communion in collective “transfiguration” might similarly reflect this possibility. And Titania’s offer to “purge” her lover’s “mortal grossness” reveals the divine civilizing power in the female to “knit” the male into her body, and thereby create a new race of heroes. “Neither myth nor religion alter *natural* law” (Auden 56), but this cycle of communion and transubstantiation reiterates the

eternal process of nature which makes everything immortal in its endless burial and resurrection in an infinite variety of forms.

Paradox: Henry Peacham's 1593 definition of paradox is applicable to Shakespeare's work: "*Paradoxon* is a form of speech by which the Orator affirmeth some thing to be true, by saying he would not have beleevved it, or that is so straunge, so great, or so wonderful, that it may appeare to be incredible" (Peacham, 112). Puttenham calls the figure of paradox "the wondrer" which affirms faith by appealing to doubt" (Puttenham 226). Peacham's *synaeceosis* is, "a figure which teacheth to conjoine diverse things or contraries, and to repugne common opinion with reason." (Peacham 170) This helps with Hippolyta's conjunction of the lovers' common story as reasonable. Puttenham defines it as "the *Crossecouple*, because it takes two contrary words and tieth them as it were in a paire, and so makes them agree like good fellowes" (Puttenham 206). Thus, Mother Nature is also the Amazon killer mother.

Puttenham distinguishes hyperbole as the worst kind of deceiver which works "beyond the limites of credit" (Puttenham 154). He notes the Greek word "hiperbole", and the Latin, "dementiens", as the "over reacher", or the lying figure. (Puttenham 191) It insists that we accept a false universe. Adelman notes that "All paradox demands an act of faith, but hyperbole is that species of paradox which poses the crisis of truth in its most acute form" (*Liar* 113). As I will address, this is exactly what Hippolyta says and does, and her strikingly similar words, "strange and admirable" embrace contradictions, which is similar to Peacham's description of overcoming disbelief. Cleopatra also expresses confusion in her dream of Antony, after his death, and Enobarbus' description of her to the skeptical soldiers, and the Cleopatra concerning her end, as a mother nursing Antony

as an infant and a male lover; divine Athena, or Terra, nursing serpents; Isis, the worm of death translating the serpent of the Nile back to the slime, and the fallen woman transcending death to unite with her bridegroom for eternity.⁵⁶

A paradox, according to Rosalie Colie, is “primarily a figure of thought. It dazzles by its mental gymnastics, manipulation, even prestidigitation, of ideas. The rhetorical paradox has a double aim of dazzling—of arresting thought altogether in the possessive experience of wonder—and of stimulating further questions, speculation, qualification, even contradiction on the part of the wondering audience” (*Paradoxia* 23). Coleridge, Cleanth Brooks, and I. A. Richards all agree that paradox is the supreme value of poetry, and Lyons reads the poet’s response as, “a unique tension of ideas to the opposition, making the meaning of the obvious action into something extraordinary, but attainable because of the work of the poet” (*Ambiguity* 14). Hippolyta’s poetry transfigures the confusing ambivalence of love into something constant and divine. In the “strange and terrible” events leading up to her suicide, Cleopatra transfigures herself and Antony into marble-constant immortal gods. The warrior queens’ imagery defeats tragic decay in comic rebirth. “Such tricks hath strong imagination”, so mythopoetics simplify paradox.

Shakespeare demonstrates paradox as, “the essential nature of humanity” (Freake 262). The ability to negotiate this deadly space informs the final authority in society. Shakespeare brings Venus and Mars, the most everyday Renaissance myth, to the fore, in order to help the audience understand and interpret those “irreducible psychological problems” inherent in the very biology of our species—the universal battle of the sexes—

⁵⁶ Zaleski notes that “magical prayer texts in weddings and funerals contain both “kissing” and “consuming” rituals. Like Titania’s promise to “purge Bottom’s mortal grossness,” the ritual death pun that accompanies weddings hastens redemption, heals sickness, and makes rain (Zaleski 40).

in familiar terms. His warrior queens signal eternal peace when they speak the final words that validate their lovers as glorious leaders among the immortal heroes.

Shakespeare places Amazon queens opposite the heroic men in his plays in order to reframe the classical allegories and ancient myths in modern tropes.

Prosody: Frye reminds us that poets in Shakespeare's day, "hated to admit that they were writing words on a page: they always insisted that they were producing music" (*Imagination* 89). Kehler introduces *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as Shakespeare's highest lyrical achievement where "he makes music out of language" (Kehler 3). For Brooks, the beauty of *Midsummer* is created by the eye of the imagination by the poetry sung and spoken" (Brooks cxxv). Poetry has a potent ally in music and dance, which extend the lyrical words to movement; thus, lovemaking may be seen as an extension of the imaginative act, or poetry.⁵⁷ Brooks adds that "the distance from dialogue to song is not great, and the songs and dances are as integral as the speeches" (Brooks cxxiv). For example, in *Midsummer*, fairy music induces supernatural sleep. The lullaby invokes Philomel, or, "the lyrical voice of love," and prepares the sleepers for the magic. Throughout this thesis, I will address how Shakespeare uses poetry in music to introduce or accompany supernatural events which blend opposites, such as when the fairies shake the ground with their dance of renewed harmony and wake the lovers with hunting horns.

Pun: In her combination sex and death act, Cleopatra is "a living pun" (Garber *Fatal* 269; *Antony* 1.2.148-151; 4.15.39-43). This figure draws attention to itself as it layers meaning, in ambiguity, and forces double-vision of contrarities.

⁵⁷ For more on Keats' fascination with the lyrical magic of *Midsummer*, see Caroline Spurgeon's *Keats's Shakespeare*, 87-104, cf., 51 f., 62-65. See also Spurgeon *Shakespeare's Imagery* 263; Olson 115; and Nuttall 332.

Rhetoric: Auden called New Critic, Laura Jackson, “the only living philosophical poet” who read Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity* with his eye for poetry. She notes that “Poetry uncovers truth of so fundamental and general a kind that no other name besides poetry is adequate except truth” and asserts: “Rhetoric can make the false seem true” (Jackson *Reclaiming Rhetorica* 248). This relates to Kermode’s New Testament Christian Truth, as love.

Shakespearean Wink: This figure of speech is a metatheatrical, mythopoetic joke with the reader, and requires the audience to adjust the lens (or blink one eye) through which they interpret Shakespeare’s work. In this sense, Shakespeare’s texts reward the attentive audience member or reader with clues, puzzles, riddles, puns, connected imagery, symbols with deep philosophical messages, silly rhymes, and clever word games with at least double layers of meaning. This enriches the experience of active reading and provides new insights which Virginia Woolf called “winks” (*Three Guineas* 161). An example of a Shakespearean “wink” is that Ninus is named as *Midsummer’s* cuckolded king, at whose tomb Shakespeare’s Pyramus and Thisbe ironically plan to meet. Bottom, as Pyramus, keeps getting the name wrong, saying “Ninny’s” instead, which draws attention to the irony of true love. An additional, deeper connective layer between the queens is that Ninus’ cuckolding wife, Semiramis, is related to Cleopatra through Zenobia.

Silence: The Amazon queens’ use of language includes powerful silences, through which Shakespeare reveals and restores their original matriarchal power to create, and thereby offers his audience an opportunity to reconsider the patriarchal response. Desmet notes that “Woman is the text that paradoxically cannot speak but

nevertheless speaks in its silence. Her silence is the message which desires to be read” (302). “In marriage, the husband and wife became one person in law—and that person was the husband.” (Glenn 120) Thus, we will consider the female voice.

Speech- On the other hand, Shakespeare presents warrior’s sword-tongues which never stop arguing. “Cleopatra is a figure of speech, a figure *for* speech, a living emblem of the relation between language and character, character and style—an Aegyptian hieroglyphic.” (Garber *Fatal* 269-70) Catherine Belsey asserts, “For women to speak is to threaten the system of sexual differences which gives meaning to patriarchy.” (*Identity* 191) (Glenn 136) (Cook 242) Cleopatra’s 204 speeches present a constant threat to that system. In her essay, “Sorties”, Hélène Cixous also makes a similar identification with Cleopatra “whose unimpeded tongue bursts partitions, classes, and rhetorics, orders and codes, inundates, runs through, and goes beyond the discourse of phallogocentrism with its last reserves.” (Cixous 94-5) (J.L. Hall 168) Hall joins fellow feminists, Cook, Cixous and Clément who theorize how women might similarly “cut free from phallogocentric discourse” (qtd in J.L. Hall 168).

Transfigure: The word “transfigure” means a heavenly, or spiritual change of form. In this play, Shakespeare celebrates the transfiguring and enduring power of night vision, or second sight: “Transfiguration is the method and the glory of this play” (Bloom *Ages* xii). Bryant argues that Shakespeare used Scripture as contemporary humanists use classical allusions; to ornament a tale or point to some abstract value”, and thus, “Hippolyta’s view, if not exclusively Christian, is at least consistent with the distinctively

Christian teaching” (Bryant 16, 3). These Classical and Christian figures function together, in mythopoetics, to join a wider view of all story.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ A. B. Taylor notes that “Knowledge of the ancients which the humanists called the *studia humanitatis* has been effortlessly absorbed, and informs Shakespeare’s work throughout.” Incontestably first in importance is Ovid, in the original Latin, as well as Golding’s English translation. Plutarch supplied the contradictory tensions in men’s characters, but Shakespeare “made them into something miraculously new” (*Shakespeare and the Classics*, 2). Taylor also observes that Shakespeare “shapes the dream of all that man might be, embroiled in a shuddering confrontation with the sordid reality of what is ugly in human nature” and argues against “the view of many scholars” that “the classics were no more useful to Shakespeare than any other literature” (2). Taylor’s book is predicated on the obverse principle, because of the prestige of antiquity, the influence of Renaissance humanism, and the character of his educational curriculum.

Chapter 2

Battlefields: These Lovers Seek a Place to Fight

Saccio asserts that “Antagonism is as fundamental as desire in the battle of the sexes” (Saccio *Word Part 1* 38).⁵⁹ In other words, there would be no stories without opposition to authority. In the early comedy, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Shakespeare uses the cultural tradition of marriage to reflect that paradoxical force of love that simultaneously tears as it conjoins. He portrays the natural conflict in the quarrelling fairies, the young Athenians, and the artisans who re-enact the ancient tragedy of patriarchal law constraining desire in love for the elevation of duty. And, as allegorical figures for the original cosmic forces of Love and War, the aging military enemy-lovers, Theseus and Hippolyta, set the precedent for the action of all of the lovers. So, as Hesiod’s Gaia, the Old Testament Eve, and the wily Venus, the audience understands that the Amazon queen is the object of the struggle, even before the marriage play begins.

Similarly, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the opening lines of the tragedy reflect the competitive power struggle around containing the “Great Queen[’s]” sexuality, before we ever see her. Her crisis is that she is not properly married to her lover, “the word of war”, and he marries his rival’s sister (2.2.48). These disasters disrupt the queens’ strategic efforts to overturn the patriarchy, and reclaim their original sexual freedom of speech.

⁵⁹ Beckerman agrees: “Cleopatra’s detached and calculated mockery is a necessary stimulant of Antony’s rapture. She deliberately arouses him, and that action inextricably binds rage and lust” (103-104). See also Girard *Violence and the Sacred* 144.

However, the fact that two very different queens' feminine presence commands the male attention and action in two very different plays, on opposite ends of Shakespeare's canon, emphasizes the mythical grounding of the universal theme: "the course of true love never did run smooth" (1.1.134). In fact, these dangerous and willful queens demonstrate that love is war. And, as DusiBerre posits, the natural female possesses the most powerful weapon of inscriptive power—words.

Although Puttenham's "great Madame Rhetoric" (118) is usually represented as a seductive woman, she also appears in an illustration ascribed to Mantegna, as an emblem of the martial, Ciceronian ideal. So, like Venus, and the Greek warrior queens, she demonstrates both genders, as an emblem of Roman reason and Greek artistic ornament. Chastely dressed, and draped in the style of a Venus Pudica,⁶⁰ Rhetorica nevertheless wears both helmet and sword, resembling the allegorical Venus Victrix and the wise, mythological virgin warrior, Athena, born of Zeus. Desmet specifies that "Rhetorica claims for herself the persuasive *weapons* of *combative* Ciceronian rhetoric, the high style and probable arguments of political debate, and outdoes men at their own verbal games" (305).⁶¹ Lanham explains the way that these female figures of speech function to shape reality: "Rhetorical patterns become habits of mind that shape thought itself" (129). And, "the duplicity of language which describes Cleopatra's character functions as a rhetorical figure of speech" (Garber *Fatal* 269).⁶²

⁶⁰ From the Latin, "pudendus," refers to the fact that the nude Venus is depicted covering her genitals.

⁶¹ Shakespeare's Christian audience might have heard a reference to the female martyr, St. Katherine, a popular icon who outwitted the King's scientists, philosophers, priests, etc., with her rhetorical power. She was martyred to silence her rebellion against marriage to the King, because she insisted that her will, and her love belonged to one much greater.

⁶² Examples of Cleopatra's duplicitous rhetoric include, 1.1.49-50; 1.2.207-208; 2.2.241; 2.2.247-249.

While Garber calls Cleopatra a “figure of speech” (*Fatal* 269), Desmet observes: “Women who cease to be written fictional figures and assume their place as speaking subjects, dominate the play” (305). As *Rhetorica*, “they usurp *for their own ends* the arts of masculine debate, disfiguring the social hierarchies, masculine tropes, and public rhetoric fashioned to strengthen the community of educated men in Theseus’s Athens” (Desmet 305). *Rhetorica*’s main threat to the patriarchal order lies in her eloquence which contains the power to arouse and or emasculate men—to twist their logic like Antony’s “fuming” brain (2.1.24).⁶³ Desmet explains that *Rhetorica* might even subvert masculine business by “speaking in silence,” and thus asserting willful disobedience, like Hippolyta might do (Desmet 302). They outdo men at their own verbal games. In this way, the Amazons fight to imprint or “seal” their own imagined reality despite the man-made laws that contain them.

The Ciceronian image depicts masculine martial persuasion, while Baldassarre Castiglione’s *The Courtier*, balances that figure with one where “women and rhetoric work together to civilize man” (Javitch 1), or “refine”, as Puttenham suggests. (114) As we have heard, Montagu assigns that civilizing force to feminine: “The genius of the feminine is *humanity*, the ability to love others more than one loves oneself. It is the supreme form of intelligence. All other ideologies for ordering society are dangerous to the world” (Montagu 237, 279, 240).

⁶³ J. B. Boudard depicts *Madame Rhetorique* as, “a gracious, laughing woman” who is scantily dressed and reclining backward and beckoning to spectators with an open hand that stands in opposition to Logique’s closed fist.” Boudard *Iconologie*. Vienna 1766; rpt. New York: Garland, 1976; Logique is found in Tome Second, 159, Rhetorique in Tome Troisieme, 103. For another description of Rettorica, see Cesare Ripa in *Iconologia* 1593, Padua, rpt. New York: Garland, 1976. Pg. 460. Figure 103. In this image, she holds a scepter and a scroll.

According to Green, Anne Barton uses Hippolyta's "corrective" poetry to "dismantle gender hierarchy" (Green 384). "The play has created its own reality", she writes, "touching our own", one beyond the "practicalities" of Theseus's common-sense view of the world" (A. Barton *Introduction* 221, 219). "When the women step out of their texts and speak up, they offer a feminist poetics that transforms their political usurpation of humanist rhetoric into an ethical act, they change reality for everyone" (Desmet 315). Conversely, Alan Sinfield hears patriarchal convention reasserted, and sexual containment reinforced in his queer reading: "If finally the text curbs the willful exercise of paternal power, it still ends with the erasure of Amazons, the paternal sanctioning of desired unions by Theseus, to ensure or enhance procreation, and the curbing, too, of Puckish pleasures in 'those things.../ That befall preposterously'" (3. 2. 120-21) (10).⁶⁴

Gohlke's feminist view also champions the supposed victim of the patriarchal sword/phallus. Hippolyta's opening lines, "in which the sword may be the metaphoric equivalent of the phallus, in which love may be either generated, or secured by hostility, and in which the two partners take up sadistic and masochistic postures in relation to each other" (171) are not irrelevant to the concerns of the play, as many critics posit. "They reverberate in the exaggerated submission of Helena, the humiliation of Titania, and the penetration by violence of the language of love" (171). These critical observations apply to both foreign queens, who personify the dual nature of love as exotic armed warriors.

Hippolyta clearly depicts this myth as an Amazon Queen. Adelman explains that the image of Cleopatra wearing Antony's sword also evokes, "one of the most complex Renaissance iconographic topoi: the *Venus Armata*" (Adelman *Liar* 92; and Wind 75ff.,

⁶⁴ See also Rich "Compulsory Heterosexuality" and Garner 47. See also Goldberg on the meaning of "preposterous venus" (*Sodometries* 180-181).

91ff). According to Adelman, armed with bow and arrows, the archetype borrows the weapons, and consequently the values, of Diana, protector of the Amazons, and represents “all things to all mythographers” (Adelman *Liar* 92). She specifies that the most common version of *Venus Armata* is the *Venus Victrix*, who wears armor as the emblem of her conquest over Mars, “and of all the consequences, moral and cosmic, of that conquest.” This figure is a Renaissance commonplace meaning that “her presence would be recognized in the briefest of allusions” (*Liar* 92).⁶⁵ For instance, the *Venus Victrix* is suggested in Cleopatra’s depiction of herself wearing Philipian, and then enacts the role of her divine prototype, armed onstage, at Actium (93).⁶⁶ These depictions demonstrate the antagonistic forces that inform and complicate love, as Mars and Venus exemplify in their cross-dressed, cross-gendered Amazon encounter.⁶⁷

In the first scenes of both *Antony* and *Midsummer*, Shakespeare establishes his queens as dangerous matriarchal Amazons who represent the ancient goddess of creation simultaneously, as: a mysterious, shapeshifting serpent; cornered prey; an unpredictable Cupid, or bewitching Circe; a male warrior; and a female virgin/whore in the image of

⁶⁵ See also Woodall 191.

⁶⁶ In a classical allusion, Adelman further notes that the armored Venus can be readily identified with Minerva, or Athena, the goddess of wisdom and strategic warfare and sponsor of the arts, and poetry in particular. Like Achilles’ mother, Thetis, Minerva forged armor and weapons for her child, while inside her father’s head. Vulcan split his head open with a hammer to relieve his headache, and his daughter burst forth, fully armed for combat. Antony calls Cleopatra “My Thetis” (3.7.60), as well as “my heart,” which emphasizes her relationship as military and *maternal* armorer of his body. This analogue between himself and Achilles might also foreshadow Antony’s irrational jealous rages in yet another reference to his patron, Hercules—showing them all as one story.

⁶⁷ See also Wind 85, and L. Martin 174-82. Also, Adelman addresses one of Shakespeare’s sources and notes that, looking back to Egypt, we might see two queens, together, in Venus. Adelman mentions that Vulcan’s shield carries an inscription: “Aegyptia coniunx” (*Aeneid* 8.688), which means “Egyptian wife” and “emphasizes Antony’s devotion to Cleopatra” (Adelman “Tradition” 183). In an alternate reading, since it is a shield, it might also serve as a symbol of *defense against* the warrior queen, since Vulcan’s wife, Venus, seduced Mars in his cave. This shield also recalls Aeneas’ shield, which both warns the attacker and protects the hero with Medusa’s embossed image. For more on this topic of “the monstrous and the marvelous,” see Gillies 122.

the moon. And, just as the moon appears in each level of our imagined universe, as Cynthia, Diana, and Hecate—Love parallels the moon in the celestial imagery of the planet Venus. So, in *Venus Genetrix* of positive cosmic generation, and the earthly *Venus Armata* of corrupted earthly passion, the metaphor is doubled in the figure of *Venus Victrix*.⁶⁸ Cupid, or Harmony, the ungended result of their infamous union according to Ovid, plays a large part in the dramatic action, as he reminds the audience that the little love/war god is the author of confusion, as well as creation. According to Ovid, Cupid has two arrows; one instills desire, and the other, repulsion. Thus, in this character's force, Shakespeare shows us how natural opposites such as love and war, and reason and desire, exist in one body, together, as well as in two separate individuals. And, as Saccio mentioned, Shakespeare's warrior queens provide essential antagonism, as they assert their wills against the patriarchal society. In this reading, the undercurrent of erotic violence in both plays is evident in the queens' opening lines.

More specifically, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hippolyta's first words set the competitive tone of the play, as she tactfully continues to do battle against Theseus after her official defeat, despite her status as his captive war trophy. Her bold, but artfully ambiguous opposition, as Saccio points out, seems to intrigue and inflame Theseus's passion rather than anger him, and he redoubles his efforts to please her. Critics are divided about how to interpret the Amazon queen's response to her upcoming marriage to Theseus, and how she interprets his promises to "put away funerals", and to wed her in

⁶⁸ Shakespeare borrows Aeneas' vision of Venus from Vergil's *virginis arma*: "on her shoulder she carried a bow as a huntress would" (*Aeneid* 1.327). "In the semantics of emblems, the bow, a weapon of Cupid-love, and the bow, weapon of Amazon-virgo, was a mediation between Venus and Diana" (Kott *Bottom* 76). The harmony of the bow, was for 'harmony in discord,' a unity of opposites." From the adulterous relations between Mars and Venus, the daughter Harmony was born. "Harmony, as Neoplatonists repeated after Ovid, Horace, and Plutarch, is *concordia discors*, and *discordia concors*" (Kott *Bottom* 77).

“another key.” Ironically, Theseus’ next action is to condemn Hermia for opposing her father’s will for her marriage.

As Desmet predicts, Hippolyta’s loud silence increases the dramatic tension around their impending nuptials, and her captor overwrites his Athenian law to extenuate that which “by no means we may extenuate” (1.1.120), in the case of female disobedience, to achieve peace in his house, as well as in his city. Hippolyta’s vision and subsequent speech might demonstrate the power by which she is moved to extenuate *her own* Amazon rule against marriage. Adelman and Saccio further explain that Shakespeare provides a parallel view of the earthly royal couple’s inner workings in the heavenly quarrels of the Fairy King and Queen, Oberon and Titania, as well as those of Venus and Mars. When nature shows how reason and desire delights and confounds at least five analogous worlds, Shakespeare elects Hippolyta and Titania to simultaneously stop playing the Amazon rebel of nature, and introduce comic order to the chaos in enforced sexual compliance, or marriage. Thus, is Hippolyta eternally knit with Theseus, as his lawfully wedded wife.

Similarly, Cleopatra’s first lines present an artful challenge. Michael Hoffman directs the seductive queen, in her private boudoir, holding the great Roman general’s head in her lap. This physical posture instantly informs the audience of the emotional situation, as the symbol of desire holds duty hostage in this vulnerable attitude, similar to Renaissance depictions of Venus subduing Mars. Cleopatra also speaks first, which further demonstrates her emasculating power, as she limns his rough face with eyeliner and lipstick, and muses: “If it be love, indeed, tell me how much” (1.1.14). In this seemingly idle question, Cleopatra asserts her regal confidence, as if she has every right

to ask Antony to conquer the world, or die for her, in the ultimate noble act of Christian love. Like Theseus's new "key," Antony declares that his love would require "A new heaven and earth" (1.1.17) in which to express itself.

Antony's next action also parallels Theseus' condemnation of Hermia, contradicting the very oath of love he has just finished swearing to Cleopatra. Antony defers desire for Egypt to duties in Rome, where he marries another woman. Throughout the remainder of the play, Queen Cleopatra plays Antony's desires like a deadly sex-game: baiting and losing him, like a trophy fish, until he finally lies, gasping and dying, in the dust at her feet, and she reels him into her monument/tomb. Although Caesar pretends to offer to "extenuate rather than enforce" (5.2.125-26) if she will comply, Cleopatra defies him, and changes chaos to constancy in her final speech, which imagines a new world order in eternity, as Antony's wife.

Hippolyta's First Scene

In a queer reading of *Midsummer*, cultural materialist Alan Sinfield proffers a strong statement that Hippolyta's silence reminds us that she has been gagged, and that this event represents "a commonplace instance of an endemic crisis in patriarchy" (68). Sinfield also reads the play like a feminist with a defensive socio-political agenda. However, he notes that, before her silence, "[Hippolyta] invokes the moon, an image of chastity" which further supports her silent withholding after Theseus's speech. In the opening scene, we learn that Hippolyta is "linger[ing]" Theseus's "desires," just as Titania has "forsworn" Oberon her "bed and company." As I have suggested, Hippolyta seems to follow Titania's spirit in breaking her silence on the Fairy Queen's signal. Sinfield notes that "The resolution of this *disturbance*—albeit by magical affirmation—

enables a reading of the ending, as “a fresh affirmation of marriage” (Sinfield 68).

Sinfield’s tongue-in-cheek “albeit” marks the beginning of his objection to patriarchal force. He pursues this argument rather than casually dismissing the magical forcing of Titania’s will—and Hippolyta’s, by extension—as inconsequential. This reading also names Oberon as the agent of change. Instead, I contend that it is Hippolyta who apprehends and articulates that magic on Theseus’s mind, in her silence and in her poetry.

Nuttall’s mythical and historical reading first casts Theseus as a brutal womanizer,⁶⁹ and slayer of beasts, or even simply a military version of Knox. He holds that the opening sequence of *Midsummer* is the “prominent mind-setter” which “very swiftly” sets up past violence (*Apotrope* 51). Taylor observes how Shakespeare builds tension: “The moonlight and rich poetry at the opening of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* tend to overshadow the fact that Shakespeare’s marriage play opens in the wake of a full-scale war between the sexes, in which the legendary Amazon women have been defeated by the Athenian men” (A. B. Taylor, *Ovid’s Myths* 49). This view suggests that the lines—“Hippolyta I woo’d thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries” (1.1.16-17)—contain an important theme that only after violent aggression on the man’s part (sword) and pain and suffering on the woman’s (injury) can harmony cohere in a relationship. Taylor suggests that “The ‘sword’, the shedding of blood, and ‘love’s wound’ takes one to the very heart of Shakespeare’s marriage play which centres upon the more natural wound of love in the act of defloration that brings not death but life”

⁶⁹ Nuttall asserts that Shakespeare’s Theseus is the same man as Thésée, whom we meet in *Phedre*, Racine’s black tragedy. He insists that “it is a mistake to suppose that the darker side of the mythical material has been excluded from the play.” (121) Frye notes that Theseus’s record was a very bad one with rapes and desertions in it (Frye in Bloom 129), and Plutarch’s Antony was “a rather brutal gangster.” (Frye, *On Shakespeare* 125)

(Taylor *Ovid's Myths* 56).⁷⁰ Both human and divine male authorities impose their patriarchal force on the lovers, and blame and punish the women for all of the chaos, as dangerous instigators of imagination.

Theseus's "vaunt" of victory is repeated in others: Egeus against Hermia, Theseus against Hermia, Demetrius against Helena, Lysander against Hermia, Oberon against Titania, and the lion, or fate, against Thisbe. Schwarz notes that the heavy weight of these readings profess "a constancy of their own" which the play is "about" (208). However, Schwarz also states that the moral of the story has changed for "us": it was about the social and sexual subordination of women to men as, "natural and celebratory"—now, it is a source of "uneasiness and conflict" (208). She observes that, as widely divergent as modern readings have become, "they share an interpretive impulse, finding emblematic condensation of the play's concerns in the story that Hippolyta—as queen of the Amazons, and bride to Theseus—tells" (209).

For instance, Theseus's first words, "Now, fair Hippolyta..." (1.1.1), focus on the warrior queen as, "*fair*" which heralds the gender inversion of masculine reason and feminine desire, as "fair" implies both "desirable" and "balanced in reason and judgment." This reading prompts an expectation of good sense, when Hippolyta's imaginative powers simplify the complicated particulars of the love stories into a reasonable, albeit irrational, template of truth. She proposes that they all suspend disbelief, and, at the same time, believe in the natural ambivalence of love, and thereby effect a mystical and realistic truce which disempowers the imminent tragedy and blesses the lovers in comedy. In the line, "Now, fair Hippolyta," both feminists and misogynists

⁷⁰ "Vulnus" is Latin for "wound" in early 17th century usage. The sense of feminine "vulnerability" proceeds from this understanding.

agree that Shakespeare shows us Hippolyta from Theseus's, or Oberon's point of view, connoting the image of a hunter circling his victim. Dramatic convention dictates that the highest male authority, Theseus, must open the play, but the reference to the Amazonian warrior queen in the *dramatis personae* also prompts the reader to ask immediate questions about this playwright's likely double meaning. The pride of place of this deep and double theme demands close examination.

Like Saccio's binary opposites of masculine reason and feminine desire, Taylor uses sexist polarities to advance a "new story" counsel: "Theseus, the conqueror of women, needs to discover the 'woman' in himself", as his mentor, Hercules, had done" (A. Taylor *Double* 50). The warrior queen's words artfully orchestrate that movement and, alongside his sensible compromise, saves the comedy, and presumably many lives, including Theseus's. Taylor's unusual, romantic reading argues that Hippolyta *willingly* surrendered to Theseus' conquering wound, with his phallic sword, on the battlefield. In his equally uncommon view, Nuttall identifies a "wholly benevolent Theseus" who "successfully banishes the old dark narrative from the play, and the smiling Duke of Athens springs up in its place" (*Apotrope* 51).⁷¹ This Duke claims another musical key.⁷²

Nuttall suggests that "Shakespeare is saying as clearly as it can be said that that is not what he is after. Theseus's words actually change the old story itself" (*Apotrope* 52). However, if that is true, and Shakespeare wants to tell a simple story of happy love, it is

⁷¹ "The slayer of the female monster, the Crommyonian sow, and the Cretan minotaur, must give way to the exemplar of civil order, justice, and moderation" (Calderwood *Illusion* 508). In the *Symposium*, Plato quotes Agathon, "At the touch of him [Love], every one becomes a poet, even though he had no music in him before." Bevington imagines that "Antony sings the music of the spheres" (*Ideas* 185) Thus, these two rational warrior rulers demonstrate the touch of Love in their musical speech and dazzled behavior.

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necessary to question why he specifically names Theseus as the wooer of the specifically-named Amazon queen, Hippolyta. Further, why does Shakespeare immediately include swords and injuries, and let the word, ‘ravished’ reverberate in Oberon’s speech? Nuttall considers this shadow in the ancient model of heroic excess, in light of how Shakespeare transfigures deadly military triumph for his Christian hero. He insists that Theseus “should certainly not be kneeling, in these first lines, as some actors do, here, but rather to strut.” (54-6). So, although the first scene enacts a “complete suppression of sexual violence”, it is “laced with a nervous, intermittent memory, and the fairies also carry the burden of dark history”⁷³ (Nuttall *Apotrope* 54-6). Similarly, Shakespeare’s “Theseus performs an “apotrope” of his former self at the outset, and the play proceeds through a series of rejected old scripts⁷⁴ as the myths are retold in an efficacious ritual. The director who allows a shadow of a minotaur to be cast onto the backcloth, would not, I suggest, be exceeding his interpretive brief” (*Apotrope* 54-6). Therefore, Nuttall asserts that the deeply violent source myths are deeply woven into the dramatic themes of this play.

In this reading, that same director’s pre-play dumb show might foreground the minotaur’s shadow with an actual, armed, and raging Amazon warrior queen trying to kill Theseus, in order to add context for Shakespeare’s first scene, or to provide missing classical background context for today’s audience. Unlike Kermode, Nuttall insists that “this apotropaic negotiation between joy and fear survives the comic ending” of *Midsummer* (*Apotrope* 59). The act of mythopoetic vision allows a Christian audience to

⁷³ Celtic Fairies are called “the good folk” or “the kindly ones,” just as the dreaded classical Furies are also called the “Eumenides” in a poetic attempt to remake them to “bless” rather than play and deadly tricks on people.

⁷⁴ Seneca’s *Hercules*, Euripides’ *Bacchae*, and contemporary Racine’s *Thesee*, and *Phedre*, Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*.

recognize Theseus as the redemptive Bridegroom, Christ, in the inconstant, mortal cad. However, in the mythopoetic inversion of tragedy, it is not the men, but the warrior queens themselves who receive this narrative power from their creator, and name and locate the heroes. “Theseus can’t stop strutting,” and he leads off, “owning a sort of insensitivity that is perhaps peculiar to males”, and “that is why it is important to listen carefully to any woman who is present when he speaks” (*Apotrope* 121). Here, Nuttall defends a clear feminist reading.

If Theseus renounces his old wars for love, the same might be said of Hippolyta’s mythical record as “androkton.” Reflecting Schwarz’s Amazon encounter, both Theseus and Hippolyta become softer and more reasonable in relationship, “as a forecast for all of the relationships in the play where apparent hatred and warfare lead to devotion and peace” (Calderwood *Illusion* 511). However, he holds that view for reasons of misogyny, rather than a freeing revelation: “this relational theme of coercion by compulsion is paralleled in Titania’s rebellion” (2.1.26-30) where Oberon does to Titania what Theseus does when he conquers Hippolyta: “to re-establish the hierarchical order between the sexes” (511). I argue that the couples might reach peaceful communion when the individuals find their way back to the maternal matrix. I posit that, while Shakespeare makes his matriarchal warriors reiterate their reluctance to give up the habit of fighting for male power, when they apprehend a vision of freedom which escapes that form of sexual bondage for both sexes, under the ancient male aegis, their speeches hear and articulate the echo of the Great Mother. Thus, they reclaim their inscriptive rights to their bodies, and enact their endings in the memory of the original god-bearer.

Midsummer begins and ends with Theseus complaining about how long he must wait for sex with Hippolyta (1.1.1-6; 5.1.32-37). That he bothers to endure “the anguish of a torturing hour” is surprising, given his inconstant and even brutal past, ravishing and abandoning women, as Oberon reports. (2.1.77-80) This story echoes Plutarch’s characterization of Theseus (8.2-3; 19.1-3; 20.1-2; 26.1-2; 29.1-2,31), as well as Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 8. 174ff.; *The Heroides* 10), and Chaucer (*Legend* 6).⁷⁵ Blits considers this proof of Theseus’s new “key” of moderation and, again, extends the hero’s example to imply the civilization or taming of his wife to save the people of Athens. (*Soul* 8) This critical view seems to oppose the idea of the civilization of the masculine by the feminine; however, Theseus’ humble retraction of his law, and Hippolyta’s acquiescence to marry him, both figure the unexpected brightness of love’s bolt:

like lightning in the collied night
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,
And ere a man hath power to say ‘Behold!’,
The jaws of darkness do devour it up (1.1.145-149)

The power struggle continues over who will frame the final story.

As Antony finds a stillpoint in Cleopatra’s kiss, Theseus anticipates the same of his wedding night. Perhaps the image of Hippolyta reminds him of something he had forgotten, such as a mother’s comfort, and it suddenly “domesticates” the aging hero into a new mindset. Phialas suggests that Theseus and Hippolyta’s love is the ideal in this play: not because it is founded on reason, but because “it leads to the bosom of God” (132). In fact, Theseus’ reason leads him away from God, but his vision of Hippolyta seems to direct his hand to follow his heart’s new key.

⁷⁵ See also D’Orsay Pearson’s “‘Unkinde’ Theseus” for more on the negative Renaissance stereotype of heroic excess.

If we accept A. Taylor's version of events—that Hippolyta willingly offers her freedom to Theseus, either on the battlefield, or on the mountaintop—it appears that Shakespeare recombines Ovid's account, in which the great Queen simply offers the protective girdle of Ares to Hercules. In the spirit of that event, Shakespeare's version shows the queen's vision of the ideal Hercules and Mars (Ares) in his living configuration as the godlike Theseus. In this gesture, Hippolyta reenacts the Virgin Mary, who offers her body as an earthly vessel for divine use in humble submission to God's will. Here again, Shakespeare's choice of "will" might mean "reasoned plan" and/or "desire for a body" to inscribe and inspire with his Word and divine testimony. The poetic act naturally reorders the confusion. Thus, the art of making love is a literal, and figurative, form of divine poetry, or prayer.

Similarly, we can read Theseus as having been transfigured by love, like the weaving Hercules, in obedience to Queen Omphale. He asks, "What cheer, my love?" which it is possible to parse as, "What is your will for my life, O Great Queen of the Heavens and Earth?" In this reading, Blits suggests that Theseus's newly reformed democratic family system is "based on the wife's consent rather than the father's authority", but it remains an old system insofar as "the husband still rules the wife's voice" (*Soul* 168). Here, Theseus might reveal his inability to interpret Hippolyta's silent play-death, and his own motivation to please, or at least keep her bad temper from killing him. For instance, when Antony asks Cleopatra's permission to leave for Rome, she deliberately takes the opposite position and drags him throughout the scene. His profoundest emotions are under the control of Cleopatra", and, in these moments, the audience loses hope for Antony as a hero" (M. Hall 164).

In that view, from the first interchanges, and throughout both plays, Theseus and Antony try to impress the warrior queens, and both women prefer to fight against and/or alongside their men. Cleopatra's only thrilling moment seems to occur when she goads Antony into his "old" heroic battle stance, intent on championing her and insists, "I will appear for a man" beside him, at Actium, to repeat their passionate Amazon encounter at Cydnus. Theseus attempts a similar key. Depending on dramaturgical and performative choices, Hippolyta might be played to assent reluctantly or enthusiastically. After her mountaintop memory of the war, she may continue that erotic struggle in the bedroom, as a natural extension of the stunning battlefield encounter, as well as the bower, as Titania.

In his new key, Theseus claims that he will transpose his tyrant's part to a lover's song of peace so that Hippolyta might love him and give him children. At the same time, Oberon, as Theseus's subconscious mind, shows himself a tyrant when he casts a malevolent curse on his queen, to punish and humiliate her will and force her into sex with "some vile thing." At the same time, and at the Duke's oak, just on the other side of the hawthorn brake/Titania's bower—Puck, at his sport, happens to translate "Bully Bottom" into a harmless ass. It is important to note that Puck does not seem to hear of, or know about Oberon's magical, time-sensitive charm that constrains Titania to love the first "vile thing" she sees. Puck's singing ass immediately stumbles into the fairy queen's bower, and she declares instant love for him. The parallel scenes in the same place, onstage, at the same time, again reiterate the love story, on earth as it is in heaven.

Similarly, this kind of finger-snap infatuation is the stuff of fairy tales, and beautiful queens who were witches, or princes who were frogs, until love's kiss magically "purge[s] [his] mortal grossness", and they will all live happily transfigured,

forever after. Hippolyta might experience divine union on the mountaintop, in a vision of Theseus's new key as the effeminized Hercules, or Christ. In this view, *Midsommer* seems to outline a classic fairy tale where the patriarchal system of obedience sounds like a traditional fairy tale. In that version of the eternal story, a male, king-of-the-jungle type of beast, devours, and "deflowers" a female, as Pyramus imagines and the Duke would condemn Hermia to marriage with Demetrius.

As punishment for withholding sex, Oberon requires Titania to willingly conjoin with, or make love to, the beast. Shakespeare relates this in the same way, and at the same time, as when Theseus warns that he cannot extenuate his law to accommodate Hermia's decision around her father's will, or death. This warning might also imply that Hippolyta's fate will match Hermia's if she does not comply. Wright describes Hippolyta as "a tamed and contented bride" which Marshall finds "hard to imagine" (92) after this first scene, owing to Theseus' seemingly post-scripted "encouragements" for her to comply (93). After all, it is not Hippolyta but Theseus who uses the word "love," as if to name and locate a truth that he desires, or needs, to complete his story.

In the sexual negotiation of politics, both plays fifth acts reflect Ovid's patriarchal *Pyramus and Thisbe*—Antony and Cleopatra repeat the action, but negate the tragedy, in the hope of resurrection in the mystical wedding. *Midsommer* entirely avoids the tragedy in the earthly weddings that prefigure the heavenly union. Both sets of lovers end the plays by claiming eternal bliss in marriage or death, through tragic turns of chance and human misunderstanding. They go to their deaths with mistaken perceptions of love through a chink, or narrowed, one-eyed view, further imbalanced by blinding desire and intensified by authorities' o'erbearing law and duty over desire. The lovers are forced to

flee to escape in death. Desire defies coercion and obeys its will to mythopoetically imagine marriage in a new heaven.

As the tyrant, Oberon, leads Titania to believe that she had loved an ass, Cleopatra leads Antony to believe that she has devoured herself in grief for him. Then, like Pyramus, jumping to conclusions upon finding the bloody mantle and misinterpreting the message, Antony despairs and tries to kill himself. The play ends with Cleopatra having no power except to imagine and construct an artifice of rhetoric in heroic death. This connection between the lovers' plot structure adds weight to the argument for the eternal "fairy toy" or "antic fable."

Like Nuttall, Marshall provides a strong feminist defense of "fair" Hippolyta, "who speaks with dignity, reason, and diplomacy—as is appropriate for a queenly prisoner-of-war—but her words are restrained and noncommittal" (92). His unique assessment does not ground "reason" in male territory, and irrational passion in the female, as Saccio, and the more emphatic misogynists do, but focuses instead on both sexes fighting with clear rational eyes. Theseus leads with more sensible concerns than simply frustrated adolescent lust. Marshall describes Theseus' patriarchal, misogynistic view of the moon as an old dowager (female) wasting, withholding, and "withering" what is left of his powerful (male) sexual value, to presumably beget his progeny.

Hippolyta's response aims at the moon, overhead, as Kott's Amazon emblem of the hunt, as a drawn weapon—a "silver bow / New-bent." Marshall addresses the uneasy, if not dangerous, atmosphere of this couple's engagement, as warfare, since "Under this sign, the Amazon warrior prepares to wed the prince who admits his abuse" (93). Although Theseus promises to wed Hippolyta in a new key, Marshall's reading suggests

that the play opens as the audience overhears a new face-off between the rival warriors, poised for new battle, on new ground, wearing wedding garments to veil their armor. As Cupid demonstrates the ambivalence of love by dipping his arrows in gold, or lead, the Amazon warriors dipped their arrows in the venom of steppe vipers, which made them function like serpents, themselves, or dragons, as though they were galloping on horseback in an attack (Mayor 34). The sting of love, or “desir’d pinch” in sexual death, completes the ambivalence of the struggle. Possibly, Love has replaced Hippolyta’s Amazon weapon with Cupid’s bow and her “new-bent in heaven” attitude echoes her own, new “key.”

According to Marshall and Kott, Hippolyta’s Amazon weapon is her bow, represented by the moon which controls the natural creative powers of the world, including the imagination. The moon also controls the tides and creates the seasons. This natural rhythm replicates the ebb and flow of life and death, sterility and fertility, decomposition and reproduction—the act of love itself. And the moon is traditionally gendered as a woman since the creative cycle embodies itself in the similarly tidal female menses. The 1540 verb “to embody” means, “to incarnate” or “provide a spirit with a body.” Thus, as Peter Saccio points out, the early modern audience blamed the moon for unexplainable, uncontrollable shifts in the physical world, and described its related psychological manifestations as “lunacy.”

Since the female form embodies this creative force and produces similarly frenzied attacks of desire which often disable the faculties of reason and propriety, in men—the patriarchal political system naturally feared the unruly female as a monstrous threat to law and order, as well as personal safety. Thus, as the moon illuminates the night,

“moonlight”, or “moonshine” characterizes the mysterious realm of nocturnal revelation, dream, imagination, violent passion, poetic inspiration, and fluctuation, in general. As a result of the moon’s natural association with women, these lunar effects are similarly engendered, and thus, devalued, disbelieved, discredited, discriminated against, and blamed for most of the disturbances in the universe by the males in authority.

Shakespeare’s use of ambiguity in the choice of the word “solemnities” draws attention to another angle on Hippolyta’s ambiguous attitude toward her wedding. This is also significant as the *final* word of her only speech in the first scene. The word parries “a festive occasion” with “a funeral.” Although its placement leans slightly toward the latter connotation, “solemnities” seems most likely to serve to establish and emphasize ambiguity and female opposition as a theme of their relationship. It sets off Theseus’s similarly ambiguous speech about viewing Hippolyta as a “triumph”, or war trophy, or as his new beloved “one-and-only” as a divinized human. His speech leads with “nuptial hour” which gives credence to C. L. Barber’s impatient womanizer reading, focused on injuring her again, in the new key of bed instead of battlefield.

It is also notable that Shakespeare’s Theseus begins his opening speech with “Our nuptial hour *draweth* near...”, as if to highlight the theme of erotic tension as the bowhunter stretches his bowstring to aim his arrow at his target. His words might be similar in tone to a person teasing a child, drawing out his words to feign danger. In child’s play, the “hunted” child’s response of either fearful shrieks, or delighted giggles, reveals the degree of safety he feels in the relationship with the stronger, armed “hunter.” In Shakespeare’s game of love, Hippolyta exhibits ambiguous responses to Theseus’ teasing, as her hunter/captor. Depending on our reading, it is possible to view her as his

willing partner and complement or as a tactful, but vicious, wounded enemy. As Kott's reading of erotic violence suggests, shrieks of delight can carry mixed feelings of terror and/or arousal, or both at once, as Fawcner maintains.

In his first lines, Theseus's boldness contains a promise to reform, but he continues in the tone of a conquering hero leading his prize in "triumph", "with pomp and reveling" (1.1.19). Marshall notes that Theseus' terms for the "solemnity", or "important celebration", are "pomp", "reveling", and particularly, "triumph" which sound more like a military victory, or funeral, than a summer wedding. Marshall also suggests that Shakespeare may include an orthographical pun on "reveling," as the word would be printed as "reulling," which sounds like "ruling" (92). The ambiguity contained in this textual "bend" of conflicting opposite meanings around Hippolyta's attitudes about marriage, further reveals Shakespeare's signature message in conflicting opposites.

Marshall hears Kott's shadows in "solemnity", since Theseus responds to that meaning by telling Hippolyta, through Philostrate, to "turn melancholy forth to funerals; / The pale companion is not for our pomp" (1.1.12-15). This might mean that Theseus truly desires Hippolyta to desire him, and hear his new key. Or, alternatively, his "friendly reminder" might serve as a warning that she should show a little more gratitude for his pompous display of her, in marriage, rather than funeral. This dark definition simply hands the Duke legal power to continue to disguise forced rape, or at least wounding, under the socially glorified protection of marriage.

Marshall empathizes with the queen when he points out that Hippolyta does not respond to this "half-apologetic assertion of will" (93), nor does she respond when he presses her, "Come, my Hippolyta. What cheer, my love?" On the meaning of

Hippolyta's silence, Frye is adamant. The fact that he asks about her "cheer" seems a "clear indication" the Queen, "portrayed throughout the play as a person of great common sense, doesn't like the set-up at all" (Frye *On Shakespeare* 39). Sinfield reads the same event as a wise, military tactic showing the opposite of a loss of her powerful identity. He interprets a feminist reaction against the system of male authority which attempts to silence Hippolyta's, Titania's, and Hermia's female power, all in the same moment. At best, she stays noncommittal. In this interchange, Charnes notes Cleopatra's "unknowability" which avoids judgment, or, "inscriptive entrapment" (*Notorious* 130).

Marshall denounces critics such as Olson, who impose a representation of power relations into the play, to confirm or reinforce a particular worldview, and ignore the conflicts that are acted out in the play. For instance, in Olson's opinion, "the movement toward an orderly subordination of the female and her passions to the more reasonable male" is "epitomized" in the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta.⁷⁶ (qtd. in Marshall 99) He notes the inversion of gender binaries of male reason and female passion, in "Theseus' impatience for his wedding night and Hippolyta's reasoned patience" (99). Marshall suggests that traditional critics like Olson, who "simply assume that Shakespeare adopted conventional models of Theseus as 'the reasonable man and the ideal ruler' and Hippolyta as the Amazon who stood for 'a false usurpation of the duties of the male reason by the lower passions' is to insure that the conflicts of the first act—

⁷⁶ Danby states that "Octavia represents Cleopatra's alternative plight for womanhood in the play—the choice is merely between alternative methods of destruction, either at one's own hands, or through the agency of the process." (Danby *Adjustment* 53) This description parallels Titania, as Hippolyta's alternative plight. And both queens, (as well as the other two-dimensional, symbolic female figures) identify each other in the reflective role of invisible, physically, and politically silenced and submissive females, either forced into marriage, or death, or both at once. Bamber asserts that Cleopatra's goal is "to make herself matter." (Bamber 64)

Hippolyta's silence and Hermia's desire to speak with her own voice—will fall on deaf ears.” (99) Marshall objects to that kind of reading which ignores the possibility of discovering a new scene of struggle, reflection, or engagement with expected ideologies. I hear these apparently opposite views, together.

Marshall complains that Olson's traditional patriarchal, misogynist views justify Theseus, Oberon, and Demetrius in their abuses of women, as natural. He objects that “male critics indulge their fantasies about Titania's erotic games with Bottom and the changeling boy, as, “the princess of sensual passion”, and representative of “the forces of lower passions in man” (Marshall 100). At the same time, Shakespeare sets up Hippolyta as the cosmic emissary, interpreter of the heavenly moonshine, and author of the summer, who figures the heroes' love story. A. B. Taylor reads romance in Hippolyta's first line which associates love with dreams, and suggests that marriage represents “something mysterious and exalted, conjuring thoughts of the new moon in the heavens giving light to a darkened world” (*Ovid's Myths* 50). Marshall locates the theme of *Midsummer* in the figure of moonshine, or imagination, and suggests that Quince's supposed malapropism announces the parallel dilemma of how to “disfigure, or to present, the Person of Moonshine” (3.1.56-57) with the image of the masculine power, “To leave the figure, or disfigure it” (1.1.51). In this textual clue, it is easy to see the parallel between women and imagination, as figures of Moonshine.

Two phrases from the mechanicals can be read as highly sexualized, and chauvinistic comments: “If he come not, then the play is marr'd. It goes not forward, doth it” (4.2.5-6), and the other, ten lines later: “...there is two or three lords and ladies more married. / If our sport had gone forward, we had all been made men” (4.2.16-17).

Marshall hears that the wordplay connects getting “married” with getting “marr’d”, in the sense of disfigured. Men naturally injure and disfigure women (in pregnancy) in the creative act of “coming” in the marriage bed, but “if he come not”, then the loveplay is “marr’d”, or unproductive. Shakespeare’s repetition of this theme might emphasize the violence men must inflict upon women to “make men.” Women must be silenced for men to rule. Marshall contends that the play might reflect (and invert) these gendered principles through classical myths such as Euripides’ *Bacchae*,⁷⁷ in which a tyrant symbolizes rationality, and defends male order against female sexual frenzy by denying the possibility of a collective reality, and imprisoning the women.

We may choose to interpret that Shakespeare’s ruler’s frenzied desire for the queen of rational rule transforms his imagination to at least appear to embrace the story of the night. Or, he might simply ignore Hippolyta’s words and continue on his path to restore order, which he began when he “won thy love doing thee injuries”, or marring, or marrying, as a form of imprisonment. Marshall’s position proposes that “this ‘double vision’ suggests that the play might parody and transform some elements of the classical myth” (100). But he insists, “even if one were to read the play as a conflict between ‘masculine’ principles of rationality and order, and ‘female’ principles of sexuality and passion, it would not necessarily follow that one should privilege these terms according to the values of traditional Christian hierarchies” (100-101). So, the idea of the “sealing day” (1. 1. 84) for the royal wedding contains the widest range of womb and/or tomb

⁷⁷ Shakespeare would have known the story from Book 3 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. To strengthen this connection, Marshall encourages us to note that in Ovid’s text, *Pyramus and Thisby* is told by a weaver as a story within the story of the *Bacchae*; just as *Pyramus and Thisby* is presented by a weaver as a play within the play of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

critical views. But, whatever the agenda, from the first interchange, Hippolyta makes Theseus wait to “come” on her terms. And, Cleopatra plays Antony’s desire to the point that he pleads with his dying breath for sex with her. Thus, sexual “sealing” is a central issue in their “chronicle” in which the Queen of Egypt positively *figures* in her ending.

To illustrate the possible transfiguration of the Old Testament Father of the ancient Law, into the New Testament Word of love, Shakespeare offers an ancient, tragic, mythical, as well, as allegorical patriarch: “Egeus’s will is divine, his prerogative undisputed” (Desmet 301). Egeus claims to have “compos’d” his daughter’s beauties and retains the right to “decompose”, or “disfigure” Hermia (1.1.46-51). Theseus founded the city, and presumably wrote the law, so they both agree to kill her if she refuses to comply. However, the art of “figuration,” or verbal ornament, is a skill which lends an orator the ability to refashion existing materials in new ways. Thus, through Hippolyta’s apprehension of the divine word of love, the lovers’ minds are then “transfigur’d” together to produce a vision of “great constancy” (5.1.24, 26). This explains how the warrior queens use poetry to overthrow the rulers’ law.

Egeus offers Hermia to Demetrius as a sign of male friendship, just as Caesar marries his sister to Antony with a handshake. Ballif notes, “Fictions of women become at once the textual promise and objects of exchange to offer proof of the bond between men” (91).⁷⁸ Hippolyta lifts them all out of that structure, together, in a verbal act of faith which affirms love as the divine creative force. Similarly, although Antony demeans

⁷⁸ See also Desmet 302. And, “Economies of Friendship: The Textuality of *Amicitia*,” in *The Usurer’s Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth Century England* London: Routledge, 1994. Ch. 2, Pp. 52-85. Also, Gayle Rubin’s essay, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on a ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975. Pp. 157-210.

Cleopatra as, “a cold morsel on dead Caesar’s trencher”, a “rare Egyptian” and a “royal wench” (2.2.225, 234), she understands and proclaims her true value as Royal Egypt in this system, and markets *herself* as a delectable “morsel for a monarch” (1.5.31). Despite the male opinion, Cleopatra, considers her touch, as a female creator, valuable enough to demand the world in exchange from her first conditional bargaining word, “if” to her final scene, translating her earthly text as an unruly “whore” to greatness as the immortal mother (5.2.311-313). This speech-act treats death as “exuberant apotheosis”, and “the power of language, the vastness of imagery, and the pattern of projecting dynamic *essences* freshly makes palpable this cosmic realm” (Markels 151, 153). Thus, the Great Queen limns herself as divine.

Hippolyta’s Silence

McGuire notes that “The opening moments of *Midsummer* include a silence—Hippolyta’s—that has reverberations that reach beyond the scene in which it is a crucial element, and touches upon the issue of how much the words Shakespeare actually penned reveal about the play” (1). Marshall points out that, “Traditionally, critics have tended to identify with Theseus’ in the beginning of the play, and read happiness in his bride, but we must first hear Hippolyta’s silence; we must recognize that she does not speak.” (94) “Hippolyta’s silence can be the primary factor in defining the nature of her relationship with Theseus, and that relationship shapes the alignments among various characters and thereby alter the structure of the play.” (McGuire 11) Whereas Blits identifies “disquiet” in that silence, as “the Athenian patriarchy is the mirror image of the Amazon matriarchy” (*Soul* 30), McGuire is one of the few critics who identifies “reassurance”, or even “excited anticipation” in the queen’s response to Theseus.

However, McGuire adds: “but the words do not compel such a conclusion” (2). He explains that the reason Hippolyta’s feelings might mirror Theseus’ is a result of their complementary but opposite descriptions of the way time moves “quickly”, or “lingers” toward the wedding day. McGuire suggests that this juxtaposition of contrarities lends “a fuller sense of the complexities of time” as they move toward convergence in the nuptial hour, “than either has in isolation” (2). Their differences might set a foundation for a harmony, or concord, that is “more inclusive, more resilient than would otherwise be possible” (2).

To elaborate this point, McGuire draws a comparison with *As You Like It*, in which Rosalind notes that for a maid waiting for her wedding day, “a se’nnight / Seems the length of seven year” but “for a thief going to the gallows / He thinks himself too soon there” (3.2. 293-94, 299-300). In this analogy, Theseus plays the giggling maid to Hippolyta’s condemned man. This gender role reversal functions as a Shakespearean “wink” that Theseus is the bride who will gain security and land in the sealing-day, as well as the “treasure” of the lover’s body, symbolized by her golden belt. In this image, Theseus might have warred against, and defeated Mars, himself, in the battle of Athens, as well as his rival Hercules, to win Hippolyta. In this way, the greatest male warrior gods ascribed high value to essential female power, and the women were forced to develop their masculinized warrior natures to defend themselves like dragons guarding treasure in caves. This recalls the cosmic allegory of Gaia, the original female force, politically bound and gagged by her husband and grandson.

Particulars also blend into universals in Theseus’s court decision ruling Hermia’s “quick” movement toward death, or unwanted marriage shadowed in Hippolyta’s

“quickly” approaching wedding day. Thus, the Duke and Egeus may represent patriarchal authority forcing female sexual power into their tight control, as Hesiod’s Ouranos did, until Gaia castrated and banished him for killing her children. This battle validates original female superiority in creating life. The male response of jealous rage over perceived insufficiency, biologically assigned to the female, resulted in wars against “each other” to prove masculine power. Ironically, in these Amazon encounters, the warriors battle to win the real “treasure” of sexually defeating the female in the Amazon encounter. But, Amazons, and Amazon-like women, such as Hermia, act as poets when they locate their desires in the mysterious female named: “I know not by what power I am made bold” (1.1.59) to insist on love, her way, and choose death rather than yield the virgin patent up against their will to an “unwished yoke” (1.1.79-82).

Cleopatra does this, too, when she can no longer love as she would. Hermia would rather live as “a barren sister” in “single blessedness” as Hippolyta, beside her, had been doing. Wilde asserts that feminist classicists decided that the Amazons served as “a kind of compensatory mechanism for the Greek patriarchs—they subjugated their own women so thoroughly that their guilty consciences created a myth to show the dreadful things that would happen if women threw off the yoke” (Wilde 4). In her queer reading, Garner notes, “heterosexuality is destabilized and same-sex love between women evoked, because men fear that if women join with each other they will not need men and will possibly exclude them or prefer the friendship and love of women” (100). This reading affirms Titania/Hippolyta’s enactments of the Amazon encounter, in which the woman defies and defends, but ultimately receives the male enemy in the service of maternal love, albeit a constrained version of it. So, the men act out of a feeling of sexual

powerlessness, and conquer their women by dividing them. In this view, the world will only flourish when Jack has Jill. Thus, Shakespeare clearly sets up the problem of female desire as the cause of male anxiety and over-control in the reason (excuse) of civil order. Like the order in a jail.

The fact that the Amazon, Hippolyta, does not kill herself, or Theseus, does *not* prove that she is reconciled to her situation. She might cooperate with his sexual killing, over and over again, in the same humour of “tragical mirth”, as Cleopatra did, with “celerity” (1.2.143) into eternity. Her words, as well as her silence in the first scene might confirm her confident superiority, as well as her noble compliance. McGuire terms this double vision of words (or not) which seem “equally capable of expressing harmony or conflict, or a combination of both” as “radical ambiguity” (3). The ambiguity is such that, even if we decide to confirm that Hippolyta’s words reassure Theseus that she will at least cooperate with him, her subsequent silence and lack of response to Hermia’s plight might signal either continued resignation to his system, or a return to war.

In another word for “silence”, a sharp listener will hear “seal” in Theseus’s words to Hermia, “betwixt my love and me”, and his words about her father’s rights to let Demetrius seal her, in marriage, or seal her up in a convent, or in a tomb. “Seal” also carries religious meanings connected to either end of life as we will discuss, as a sign of redemption in Revelation, and a rite at baptism. In this context of marriage, Shakespeare’s Theseus also connects the two women as sealed Amazons dedicated to Diana, eschewing marriage with men, who sing hymns to the “fruitless moon.” Here, Shakespeare shows Theseus trying to malign all sexual lifestyles but the one he will force them both to embrace. Ironically, he tells Hermia to “arm yourself / To fit your fancies to

your father's will" (1.1.117-118), meaning she should fight against her own natural desires and suit her patron's choice. This order opposes the Amazon way of life, and so, his admonition also directly correlates to "armed" Hippolyta, whom he expects to similarly "fit" her fancies to him, her rescuer from death, creator, or father-god. In this imagery, Hippolyta's silence represents the disfigured matriarch whose physical lips are sealed by the patriarchs. As such, Shakespeare leaves Hippolyta's silences *and* her speeches ambiguous, which means that the text remains open to critical and dramaturgical interpretation. McGuire asserts that the power of the actor who plays Hippolyta "is not minor or peripheral" for "the exercise determines the relationships among characters and the structural principle of the play" (17). As different performative choices regarding Hippolyta's silences may facilitate multiple perspectives, Shakespeare also left room for a wide response from actors to characterize the Amazon queen, and participate in creating their version of the eternal story of love.

Interpretive Choices for Hippolyta in Productions of *Midsummer*

Regarding silence and the multiplicity of potential performative choices, Homan notes that: "To be sure, the director faced with an open silence, must commit to one interpretation; but that choice establishes a significant partnership between the playwright and his interpreter" (*Review* 105). Similarly, McGuire notes that, "because of Shakespeare's ambiguous representation of the Amazon queen, in part through her silences, *Midsummer* can more revealingly accommodate adaptations" (18) such as feminist or queer readings, than other texts. For example, in Emma Rice's 2018 production at the Globe, Rice gave Hippolyta Puck's lines promising a smooth course now that "Jack shall have Jill," but adapted it to "Jack shall have Jack" to accommodate

the re-gendered couple: Demetrius and “Helenus.” The story makes the same, if not more, sense as the Amazon queen seems to possess the proper authority to tell the world how love’s course might go most smoothly, since Hippolyta has night vision.

Sidney Homan is another director and literary scholar who agrees with McGuire that “seemingly antithetical dimensions of performance actually overlap since they are rooted in Shakespeare’s texts which in itself is not absolute but rather evolutionary.” (Homan *Review* 108) Homan notes that McGuire calls for “a ‘complementarity’ aligned with quantum physics, in a view of the world that simultaneously supports several responses to a single event. To be sure, the director faced with an open silence must commit to one interpretation, but that choice establishes a significant partnership between the playwright and his interpreter” (*Review* 105). I would imagine it might seem even more poignant to the actor who interprets, or embodies, either Hippolyta or Cleopatra.

In 1934, Maximillian Reinhardt directed a romantically stylized Hippolyta with a mail headdress, and a fashionable snake draped as a scarf around her neck. Its head rests on her breast, as if prefiguring Cleopatra’s literal end. The serpent might also represent women as bogglers, like Satan tempting Eve in the Garden of Eden, or Gaia, the original fertile female force of life as Earth Mother. In his visual transformation of the snake from deadly living creature to a decorative design on a civilized gown, Reinhardt demonstrates the way that Hippolyta’s wild and dangerous warrior queen role might be renamed and absorbed as an “antic fable”, into a new life-key at court.

The snake symbol represents the memory of Hippolyta’s Amazon past which stays on her body throughout the story and may offer protection, like Medusa’s image embossed on Aeneas’ shield. Like the text, it changes from active deadly threats of death

to harmless decoration. The male hero has caged the strange and admirable serpent foe, and retrained it to produce for him, “as it was wont to be” in the other aspect of its function, as creator of life. In this interpretation, it seems that Hippolyta has forgotten her past and might not even remember how the snake motif came to appear on her dress in the first place. Like Hermia, she might have “dreams” of phallic serpents on her breast, or Titania forswearing “spotted snakes” from her flowery bed, as she and Oberon bless and protect the royal bedchamber from harm to their progeny. These images represent the “memory” of death, contained in the Logos of love. And so is Death absorbed by love, in the Amazon encounter, and saves the family.

Concerning Peter Hall’s 1959 production, at Stratford-upon-Avon, McGuire notes that Hippolyta’s silence confirms harmony. Sylvan Barnet observes that, in the last few decades, productions began to emphasize the dark aspects of the comedy. In this spirit, Oberon’s “fierce vexation of a dream” (4.1.72) contrasts with the traditional butterfly-winged child fairies, Mendelssohn’s music, and gauzy sets popular until the 1920s. When Theseus says, “I wooed thee with my sword,” modern audiences can easily perceive the violence of rape: “A play that a century ago was thought to be an airy trifle, is now seen as an image of brutality” (Barnet 136). For example, in Hancock’s 1967 production, Hippolyta was brought on stage as a captive in leopard skins, emphasizing the cruelty and lust of the human patriarchs, as a jukebox blared Mendelssohn’s wedding march.

Kott describes a misogynous reversal in which “the monstrous ass is raped by the poetic Titania” (*Shakespeare* 228) which informed Peter Brook’s RSC production, and generated more fashionable misogynous readings as erotic black comedy. John Hancock’s 1967 production is another example. His New York, Circle-in-the-Square

production featured a psychedelic set with modern lighting and optical effects. Demetrius wore an electrified codpiece and Helena was played as a transvestite. Allan Lewis describes Hancock as “a rebel outdoing Kott” in his extreme characterization of Hippolyta, “brought back in captivity, robed in leopard skins, and caged and guarded—a fierce image of a hardly chaste Diana” (Lewis 251).

Also inspired by Kott, director Ariane Mnouchkine produced a version of the play on February 15, 1968. She reported that she found nothing funny in the text of *Midsummer* except for the “delirious ending,” and described the subject of the play as, “the furious god” that sleeps in the hearts of men (qtd. in Friden 401). Fittingly, her production was “a cruel and brutal psychodrama about all sorts of love except the divine” (401). Sadists Oberon and Puck were bare-chested, and wore dirty, bloodstained jeans. Oberon raped Hermia, and strangled one of the Queen’s guards to get to Titania. “Only the mechanicals seemed sane and happy, but a tone of dark dissonance marked this inspired success” (Friden 401-02).

In 1968, John Hirsch directed a production in Stratford, Ontario that established sharp conflict between Hippolyta and Theseus, as she continues to distance herself from him while he follows her around the stage, finally dropping to his hands and knees and trying to kiss her at the conclusion of his pledge. This shows Theseus’s “awkward and futile amorousness, as he sought to convert his military victory into a sexual conquest” (McGuire 6). When the other men come onstage, they see his “failure”, and “his subsequent exercise of ducal power became a compensation for that failure” (6). This production supports the reading of Theseus’s words to Hermia as serving Hippolyta, too, similar to Oberon’s punishment of Titania’s noncompliance in “fitting her fancies to her

father's will." In this production, Hippolyta stands silently when Demetrius calls for Hermia to "relent", ignores Theseus's outstretched hand, and his "What cheer, my love?" query, and bonds with Hermia as they leave the stage, in silence, showing neither desire, nor duty, to follow him, as his male subjects articulate. McGuire observes that Hippolyta's haughty attitude contrasts Egeus and Demetrius's subservient, "With duty and desire we follow you" (1.1.127). Thus, Hippolyta's silence controls the atmosphere on stage, as Mardian and Dolabella's courtly dotage to their goddess demonstrates.

Celia Brannerman's 1980 production in Regent's Park, London, featured a queen in harem pants, and gave Hippolyta's silence a conciliatory feel. For instance, when Theseus declared his new intentions, kneeling on one knee, this Hippolyta stood over him, receiving the conqueror's submission, as one who has conquered. However, when Theseus hands Hippolyta the book of law to read the citation and pronounces the deadline as the "sealing day" of her wedding, she snaps the book shut. Further, Brannerman's Theseus reads his warning, "Which by no means we may extenuate" (1.1.120) directly to Hippolyta." She strides aggressively toward him, jams the book at him, and exits alone. Two arch-enemies: his old self, and her old self. Similarly, Peter Brook's 1970 production for the Royal Shakespeare Company had Hippolyta cross the stage after the citation of the law, and stand in that position for the rest of the scene.

In a "me, too" show of solidarity, the Queen stood up at Hermia's defiant word against consenting to Demetrius's "sovereignty," bestowed on her by her father-god. When Hippolyta refuses to respond to his question—"What cheer, my love?"—Theseus is humiliated in front of the other men and pretends to need to "school" them in something to regain his sense of confidence and control and retreat from the unruly

women. When Elijah Moshinsky produced the play for BBC-TV in 1981, his Hippolyta paced in a room lined with attendants, and she barked her lines without emotion to an armored Theseus across the room. In a military gesture, with military words, the Duke pronounced his verdict to wed her in a military triumph.

In August of 1985, Ciulei's "fierce vexation of a dream" production received almost unanimous accolades. In the opening dumbshow, Hippolyta sets the production's fundamental antagonisms in bold relief. Flanked by guards in white, a black Hippolyta, in dark fatigues with a Grace Jones crewcut, stalked in defiantly, in high-heeled boots, eyes flashing, and nostrils flaring. She stopped midstage and glared straight ahead at the audience. Expressionless—brainwashed?—white female attendants, again in white, scattering white mannequins and baskets of white fabric about the stage, tore off Hippolyta's fatigues, and threw them on the brazier, and dressed her in a floor-length white gown and vast cape. She was a mannequin among mannequins, living and inanimate. The Athenians appear as an antiseptic, First-World oppressor class types who enslave free and morally superior Third-World Amazons who return strong, mostly silent reactions.

Next, a condescending Theseus and his courtiers enter, in white, and applaud the duchess-to-be. Theseus's sarcastic, sinister, and leering "*Now*, fair Hippolyta..." begins the production with a highly charged tone. And, as the actor who played Theseus remarked in an interview: "If Hippolyta did not adjust to the satisfaction of the 'politically astute' Theseus, he could always put her back in shackles" (Clayton *Guthrie* 405-6). The other relevant production keynote occurs in the female Puck's masterful and mocking delivery of "The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be, [pause]

well—” accompanied by dismissive gestures before and a final shrug of the shoulder (3.2.463). This disgusted, sarcastic, postmodern, anarchistic tone, characterizes the anti-establishment, free love attitudes of the 1960s.

Ciulei’s film shows how Theseus strips Hippolyta of her armor and burns that costumed role in the fire. Theseus transfigures Hippolyta’s nature “back” to jog her memory of her naturally “wonted” female role, and destroys the memory of her warrior defenses against him, the male threat. Shakespeare shows Theseus as exactly the patriarchal tyrant the Amazons attacked. It is plausible that the Duke was also unwittingly conquered by her in this moment of recognition in the “encounter” on the battlefield. The power of love might have taken them both by force, both unbidden and inconvenient. Hippolyta’s text reflects this gradual absorption of her wily Amazon spirit into vague disenchantment in the court.

The 1999 film adaptation, produced by Michael Hoffman, depicts the Amazon as a compliant Victorian gentlewoman in ruffles. She appears to possess social manners, rather than combat training, and this choice leaves the audience with no sense that these two have just come from a war against each other. On the other hand, in Steve Early’s 2016 film production, published on YouTube, his straightjacketed American Indian Hippolyta is handcuffed and encircled in chains with a keyed lock on her chest. She seems to have superpowers and, when Theseus talks about fairy toys, and imagining old stories as true, she seems to curse the Nazi-themed Theseus like a voodoo sorceress. Titania and Oberon are sci-fi creatures who clearly enjoy torturing each other more than love. When Oberon accuses Titania of past loves *with Hippolyta*, rather than Theseus, the Duke runs out of the theatre. The queen’s closed-circuit TV cameras monitor his heart

attack, alone in his office, while Hippolyta simultaneously watches Pyramus die onstage from her throne.

Titania and Oberon

As for Shakespeare's hints into the Amazon Queen's power and subconscious mind, Oberon is only referred to as "King" in the initial stage direction of the 1600 quarto, and never in speech prefixes. Titania is referred to as "Queene" in both stage directions and speech prefixes which links her to Queen Hippolyta. It is notable that Oberon refers to himself as "Lord" in the first scene argument with Titania, as that title emphasizes their ambiguous nature as immortal spirits like God, with human attributes and local power. It might also illuminate the proximity of mortals to the deathless gods, and even point out jealousy of female procreative powers. Mortal children pretend to be kings and queens, but it seems ironic to see spirit beings pretending to be lords and ladies of a higher power's court. However, the most important point concerning this title, is that Titania has "unchosen" her Lord, and thwarted his sexual privilege over her body, like the Amazon warrior queen does in her opening lines.

Traditional fairy lore imagines the fairy realm as matriarchal (Buccola 65). And yet, the supposed ruler, "*Ob.*", contests her universal authority, as if his queen is simply an unruly mortal wife who needs to remember her place as his inferior. In this reading, Shakespeare may demonstrate how males since Zeus have tried to appropriate that power for themselves. In leaving out Oberon's title, Shakespeare may imply that Titania is the only entitled authority, or creator of the law, or Word of Love. This reading is supported by The *Queene*'s opening line in the scene—"What, jealous Oberon?"—which seems to pinpoint the power of her essential female nature, as well as their relationship dynamic.

In the speech prefixes, Shakespeare locates Titania's position as higher than her "fairy lord" by naming her "Queene" when she speaks, as opposed to her partner's

identification as “Ob.” Shakespeare also has Titania warn Bottom: “I am a spirit of no common rate; / The summer still doth tend upon my state” (3.1.145) which positions her power above that of the Fairy King’s. He boasts, “we are spirits of *another* sort” (3.2.388), as if to attach himself to *her* power, by association, like a woman to a man by marriage. His question of position further indicates that he might have somehow fallen from grace with her. However, in the line—“Tarry rash wanton; am I not thy Lord?”—Oberon sounds more like an insecure tyrant-master commanding a whore-slave to obey, using intimidation, than a king speaking to his queen. But she will not be bought: “The fairy land buys not the child of me (2.1.123), and, “Not for your fairy kingdom!” (2.1.144). When Titania denies his will, Oberon becomes enraged, and drugs her; then, the speech prefixes fragment her to “Tita,” or “Tyta,” as if she is not speaking as—or not completely as—herself.

In, “the summer doth still tend upon my state,” Titania sharply reminds the audience that she is a moon-goddess, and controls the tides which control the seasons. Because this line occurs when the “man-as-ass” tries to abandon her, as Oberon had, it is plausible to identify the ancient Earth Mother speaking through her votaress. Here, her words could be heard to contend directly with Oberon’s bullying order: “Tarry rash wanton, am I not thy Lord?” Both Titania and Oberon fight to accommodate the other’s sexuality to suit their own purposes, to love, and to raise a child as their own.

And, if Titania does, in fact, inhabit those mortals she names, in a sort of sporting trick to cause Oberon to prove his desire for *her*, above all, then her accusations only feign jealousy, to maintain control, since she is the one who inflamed him to impregnate the mortals, as herself. This scenario of sexual ventriloquism is analogous to Oberon

thinking he might watch the ass-man impregnate his fairy queen because he feels inadequate to accomplish what she most longs for to complete their love. And, in a darker Shakespearean wink, though they torture each other, neither one reveals that “no damage” has actually been done.

Additionally, in blessing the marriage-bed of Theseus and Hippolyta, the fairy King and Queen watch, and copulate with the mortals, vicariously, to produce perfect heirs, as they would for themselves. And, if they exist in Shakespeare’s play to simply show us Theseus and Hippolyta’s inner workings, then that projection dissolves the dark night’s shadows, and the ending is truly a comedy. In this version of the story, both Amazon and restless hero finally find themselves in each other, in the torturous hour they spend waiting for Hippolyta, as the cold moon, to change to a “new” summery attitude of fertility. The Duke even acts the tyrant by likening her to a dowager, who wastes his sexual potency while she makes up her mind whether she wants him or not. The whole encounter raises the sexual tension to the promise of fruitful union from fighting, and their wedding night completes the natural circle.

Analogous to mythological and classical myths, the mortal story of Titania and Oberon is also reflected in the Christian myth of the Holy Family, in that the Bible focusses on the virgin raised to bear the Son of God. Like Oberon, Joseph is an incidental bystander as compared to the mortal, but divinely chosen, Mother of God (Luke 1:26). Since there is no discussion of a father, it is also highly plausible to interpret Titania’s character, as either a hateful Amazon, or a mischievous fairy, unconstrained by moral concerns of reasoning humans, who simply stole a mortal “changeling” as fairies often did in common folklore (Buccola *Fairies* 50, 58). The fairy royals demonstrate the value

of a mortal child to both gender roles, which might reflect the subconscious reason that the aging warriors, Theseus and Hippolyta, agree to give up their sexual freedom to each other in marriage.

Perhaps Titania was in India, with Oberon, when she became attached to her votaress, and imagined her baby was “theirs”, since she might have inspired Theseus to impregnate Hippolyta, by inhabiting her body. Frye does name Titania as the “guardian spirit” over Hippolyta. (*Bottomless* 129) And, since the Amazon patroness is Diana, the moon goddess, Hippolyta might be read as Titania’s “votaress.” Ruth Nevo suggests that “Titania has so identified herself with her votaress that the child has become her own” (Nevo 64). Oberon also wants the boy for his own, and imagines that story using the same kind of “amending shadows.” But Titania’s imagery longs for the summery state of big-bellied late pregnancy even more than the votaress herself, and this reading exposes her own jealousies over that mortal female power.

Titania praises Bottom’s virtue, wisdom and beauty, but then when he wants to leave, she tells him that while he *sleeps*, she will purge him of his mortal grossness. She means that his body contains death, and her heavenly touch can make him “die”, or, “go” like “an airy spirit”, or a soul leaving the body. (3. 1. 152) Her prophetic claim and poetic metaphor also recalls the Christian initiation service of exorcism, before his baptismal immersion, in her font, or “monument”, or bower, or river barge, or any other symbol of her private, spiritual “space.” In this imagery, the female container, like the theatre, is both a baptismal font and a diseased fishing hole. In death, the female is at once a tomb, as a stinking corpse with blowflies, and a womb or sacred chapel, as a censor offering ritual prayer of fire and air. However one reads Titania’s sexual intentions, or events of

this scene, the Fairy Queen's poetry imagines death as sex, or sex as death, in that act, which means new life in the female *and* mortality. She seems to desire to purge her own airy spirit, and literally ground herself in his mortal grossness, in that naturally hot, wet state of summery fruitfulness vs. the cold, fruitless moon. When she states: "I will purge thy mortal grossness so / That thou shalt like an airy spirit go" (3. 1. 151-2), she might mean "I'll make you immortal by killing you, in either the sexual, or the deadly sense."⁷⁹

The ambiguous natures and subversive activities of Shakespeare's *dramatis personae* of fairies, and the women associated with them—also treated as "airy nothings"—"serve as presentations of alternatives to the existing patriarchal system." (Buccola *Fairies* 21, 67). As the Fairy Queen breaks out of the power loop and is restored to her rightful role as queen, "if not a surrogate mother" who redeems the Other by changing the story for all in selfless service.⁸⁰ Similarly, Hippolyta accomplishes this heroic feat in her marriage. The "great fairy," Cleopatra, is similarly the queen of Love, or Venus, and dies saying, Husband I come, with a "baby" at her breast. But the powerful matriarchs expose the patriarchs as preposterous *without* drugs or coercion. Even though fairy queens traditionally rule fairyland, Shakespeare sets the Lord of misrule, Oberon, as the "parallel ruler" to Theseus, like Antony: "so our leader's led, / And we are women's men" (3.7.68-9), as "something between ruler and ruled" (Buccola *Fairies* 72). Oberon plots to get himself "reappropriated into his bed and polity" to parallel Theseus jockeying for Hippolyta's favor before the nuptial night.

⁷⁹ As the "great fairy", Cleopatra did both, as both a ruthless Amazon-like warrior queen, and a warm-hearted wife, and mother, to Antony. And similarly, in her death, Cleopatra "purges" Antony of his "mortal grossness" by securing his "chronicle" as a superhero.

⁸⁰ Irene Dash describes Titania as, "the strongest and seemingly freest woman character in the play," and "speculates that the fairy might illuminate the feelings and attitudes of women reacting to dominating male behavior." (Dash *Male Magic* 83)

From this perspective, the men seize the queens' previously held matriarchal powers, and subjugate them as women who can give them children, sexually dominate, and possess as property. Buccola importantly argues that the act of defiance, according to fairy lore, is not Titania's refusal to relinquish the boy, but Oberon's violent seizure of the boy after drugging the queen. This parallels Theseus's old "key." For Shakespeare and his audience, the Fairy Queen enjoyed "unquestioned centrality of authority" (Buccola *Fairies* 73-4). Titania offers a compassionate ode to the female in her votaress's memory, but Oberon's response seems incapable of hearing feelings: "Give me that boy..." (2.1.141). He acts like a stubborn donkey, or a brute, forcing his way.

Again, Titania describes a highly liminal state of late pregnancy in a friendship *between* a mortal and an immortal, between sea and land. Her poetic themes, symbols, and tone, sound strikingly similar to Cleopatra's dreamy figures of her river barge where she, as Venus, makes love to a mortal hero, and they "stand up, peerless" from that eternal moment forward. And, as I will address later in this thesis, Hippolyta's mountaintop vision of Theseus, as Hercules, functions as *discordia concors* in the musical figure of a summer sunrise, in nature, and the spiritual world of resurrection and rebirth.

While the essentialist interpretation would understand the play's gender divisions as male reason and female passion, it is important to note that Titania sounds practical about her mortal friend's death, in childbirth, and Hippolyta sees the larger picture of the night's ambiguities, and finds her moment to "set" the ordered pairs in the eternal story of creation, despite her Amazon past. In their parallel stories, Hippolyta seems to find another key of love in marital self-sacrifice, and Titania similarly raises the boy in the

memory of a love. Meanwhile, Oberon and Theseus are both forced to use their imaginations to dream up ways to get the women to comply. Buccola notes that unless Titania is “injured” or “handicapped” by drugs, “*Ob.*” cannot rule this queen, at all. At the same time that Theseus’s tells of his first “injuries” in winning his bride, Oberon describes Titania’s sexual “disobedience” as an “injury” to him, and vows to punish her: “Thou shalt not from this grove / Till I torment thee for this injury” (2.1.146-7). Shakespeare backfires her fairy Lord’s curse in her delightful lust, and bewitched Titania constrains Bottom to *her* grove.

In this scene, the aggressive queen of the fairies captures the gentle, innocent ass/man, like the allegorical paintings of Mars enchained to Love. Frye calls Titania a “possessive and entangling spirit” (*Bottomless* 128) when she curses Bottom to stay and perform her sexual will: “Out of this wood do not desire to go; / Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no” (3.1.143-44). Her rhyming incantation sounds more like Circe, or Calypso, or Cleopatra,⁸¹ and the imagery of herself as ivy which “enrings” and “entwists” round his “barky finger” sounds like torturous bonds to enslave her prey, or even castrate him (4.1.41-44). This nightmare evokes the deepest male fears of losing “themselves” in relations with women. And, by presenting the same story on several concurrent levels, Shakespeare demonstrates that all women carry this deadly power in their fascinating enchantments. Thus, sex becomes Hippolyta/Titania’s weapon to tame and domesticate the unwitting man/ass. Here, Shakespeare presents a powerful female force for his heroes to play against, and to see how it might feel to be a captured female

⁸¹ Antony shows great anxiety to ask Cleopatra for her permission to leave (1.1.271) and cannot seem to “cast off these Egyptian fetters” (1.1.116). He is chained to her like property and enslaved like a patriarchal wife.

Other. And we will hear that he provides his audience with several opportunities to witness this critical difference between the new key of peace, free will, and choice, as opposed to the old key of intimidation, violence, and law, which supports Kermode's theory of the *New Testament* ending in mystical wedded bliss.

Cleopatra's First Scene

Bernard Beckerman agrees with many critics that "the first scene offers a clue to all the elements that follow", and adds that "it is perhaps the most intricate and adroit of all openings by Shakespeare. Not only does it contain the motifs later developed, but the very way they are dramatized establishes the frame of reference for the entire work" (Beckerman100). In the same way that Hippolyta's attack is presented as a "loss" to Theseus, and proud Titania's "ill-met" rebellion against jealous Oberon is overwritten as "defeat", Cleopatra is similarly announced in terms of the male conqueror before we see or hear her. She is indirectly described by Caesar's messengers, in terms that relate to him as, "Antony's folly", or his "disease" of "dotage" (1.1.1). The Great Queen is the unnamed force that causes Antony to be accused of giving up "a kingdom for a mirth" (1.5.18), and having "kiss'd away kingdoms" (3.10.7). And, although her rhetorical musings seem to invite Antony to answer, the soldiers marvel at Cleopatra's control of the game before she even appears. When Cleopatra asks, "If it be love..." her question might be read as a disruptive smokescreen to a political one with its own vested interests, as if to ask, "Will you offer the world for my sex?" Without giving Antony a chance to defend himself, she raises the stakes of her direct challenge to, "How much" he might

love her. Thus, as opening questioner, Shakespeare announces that Cleopatra controls Antony, in her palace, in her bed, and on her terms—speaking terms.⁸²

Cleopatra's first word, "If", sets the tone for her strategic moves to follow. Blits notes that Cleopatra begins the lovers' exchange with "a test and a tease" (*New* 17), while Mills asserts that Cleopatra's "If" makes it "obvious" (92) that she is confronting a declaration of love from Antony. Mills also observes that she is playful, but her tone changes when the messenger arrives, and "her taunts and contradictions become blunt, bold, and affrontive, and Antony's submission confirms Philo's assessment of "dotage." While "dotage" usually means some kind of "forgetfulness" because of "old age," Shakespeare decorates Antony's forgetfulness of his warrior self with an element of enchantment in love. Antony cannot seem to shake off the fog of "infatuation" as Kermode terms it (*Language* 221).

In, "The Heart of Loss", Gohlke also notes that "Interwoven into the patriarchal structure of the tragedies is an equally powerful matriarchal vision. The two are aspects of each other, proceeding from the masculine consciousness of feminine betrayal. Both inspire a violence of response on the part of the individual women, but more important against the hero's ultimately damaging perception of himself as womanish." (Gohlke 159)⁸³ "Philostrate" means "lover of battle", and he opens the play as Caesar's representative from Rome. His tone and final word, "lust," must be spat out like the

⁸² As we have seen, Hippolyta, as Titania, also "belongs" to her Lord, yet tries to similarly assert her will and control him on her terms. So does Hermia, as the representative of all women speaking out to male authorities.

⁸³ Kermode notes that Shakespeare offers Antony the same choice his ancestor and patron, Hercules, made "between Virtue on its hilltop, and Pleasure, with hell's bonfire at the end of the path. Kermode claims that "it is plain that Antony finally makes the wrong choice, but it is clearly the business of the play also to complicate the issue by making pleasure admirable as well as weakeningly seductive and, sometimes amusing." (Kermode *Language* 222)

poison he describes, as if he figures not only Caesar, but the lame, cuckolded Vulcan whose wife inflamed Mars/Antony's heart to work like his forge's bellows and fan.

The opening scene is divided into three parts, where the first and third serve as a reference for the central action. First, Philo, whose very name represents the legions or "lovers of battle", criticizes Antony for his infatuation, then they observe the couple, then Demetrius expresses astonishment to witness as true what "the common liar" rumors in Rome. This relation of shock and judgment opposes the romantic view of the couples' true love. Beckerman notes that critics of this play often place equal emphasis on the cultural contrasts between Rome and Egypt. However, Beckerman insists that the first scene belies this reading, since the representation of Antony and Cleopatra's love is literally viewed and judged through Roman eyes.

But I suggest that this framework highlights the opening lines of Cleopatra as the central figure in the scene. Her appearance is further set off by Philo's, "Look where they come: / Take but good note.../ Behold, and see!" (1.1.10-13) His impassioned directive sounds like a trumpet blast heralding the victorious entrance of a military leader. The high biblical diction in "unfolds", "ere", "hath", "do devour", and behold" associates their love with religious experience. However, Philo derides Caesar's judgment of their general's love as "dotage", and Demetrius' response to the vignette of the lovers' own battle is therefore unsurprising. In this view, we might peep through the narrow keyhole of Roman values into the Queen's magic circle.

Cleopatra takes the initiative in her first exchange with Antony: "she acts; he reacts. She opposes, cleverly tests, and thwarts him, and he does his best to match her" (Blits *New* 18). In her play on words, it is possible to identify a deadly threat, as

Cleopatra accuses Antony of offering no love “indeed”, but only “mouth-made vows” (1.3.30). J. Hall believes that Cleopatra is carried beyond her shaming attitude, into “a moment of lyric expansiveness that seems entirely unrehearsed” (114) in the lines: “Eternity was in our lips and eyes, / Bliss in our brows bent;” (1.3.35-6). Here, in a “counterpoint to her theatrical maneuvering, her passion sweeps her beyond chicanery into emotional authenticity, even grandeur” (J. Hall 114). In this interrogation scene, Antony, the world ruler, appears as a cornered pawn, and Shakespeare introduces Love, as the powerful queen on a chessboard. As the most mobile piece, she can swivel most easily, in all directions, and, most importantly, trap the King to end the game.

In this imagery, Cleopatra embodies Cupid⁸⁴ in her quick changes and lightning flashes of storms like Jove. Antony describes how leaving Cleopatra feels using the word “break” which connotes a violent rupture and a form of death: “These strong Egyptian fetters I must break” (1.2.116), “I must with haste from hence” (1.2.132), “I must be gone” (1.2.135), “I shall break / The cause of our expedience to the queen, / And get her leave to part” (1.2.176-78), “...our quick remove from hence” (1.2.195), “And I, hence, fleeting, here remain with / thee. Away!” (1.3.105-6). He is strikingly female in his apology: “I am sorry to give breathing to my / purpose” (1.3.14). She feigns sickness unto death: “...I / shall fall: / It cannot be thus long, the sides of nature / Will not sustain it.” (1.3.15-17) She drags out the scene, and continues to ignore Antony’s pleas. “Hear me,

⁸⁴ Here, Cupid figures Johnson’s “quibble.” Garber’s essay title, “Fatal Cleopatra” comes from Samuel Johnson’s famous description of “a quibble” which was something both irresistible and deadly. “A quibble was to Antony the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.” (Johnson, *Preface* 7:74) In an interesting side-note, a quibble is also associated with Puck, who led the lovers astray with his mischief, and by extension, Cupid, or Love itself. A quibble is similar to a boggler in that she confuses men, in love, like Titania is accused of, in shape-shifting to lure Theseus to various affairs with mortals.

queen: / The strong necessity of time commands..." (1.3.42-3). Her words provoke his angry threat which might also be read as dangerous lust: "You'll heat my blood. No more!" (1.3.80). This last could also bend to mean, "I've had enough, and you will no longer tempt me", and/or as a warning to her, to stop, since his next lines escalate the double threat of erotic violence in a symbolic warrior's oath sworn on his male military weapon: "Now, by my sword—" (1.3.82), and, "I'll leave you, lady" (1.3.86).

The Queen continues to fight for power, using a new strategy. She suddenly plays the part of the great general's gentle subordinate and loyal supporter. Before this point, Cleopatra had been ignoring Antony, but speaking about him to Charmian, as though he were not present. She then shifts to addressing him as "Courteous lord" (1.3.87), and "Sir", twice (1.3.88-9), and hints at the action (of marriage) which she cannot name that would secure her future. Shakespeare represents Cleopatra's lyrical speech to draw attention to her problem: "Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it:/ Sir, you and I have loved, but there's not it; / That you know well: something it is I would" (1.3.90-93). It seems that Cleopatra has been stalling for time since the news of Fulvia's death, and, before Antony leaves, she seizes the rare opportunity to politely remind/challenge him to do that "something which he well knows she would"—marry her. This action would socially legitimize, and politically solidify Cleopatra's position of power, and she longs to make Antony her war trophy. In the passage on "sweating labour" (1.3.94-95), she describes how difficult it is for her to enjoy so much sex with Antony and still keep her mind clear. These statements demonstrate that she understands the dangerous war-game

of love and death, and plays it like androgynous Cupid with his double-edged arrow/sword of love and destruction.⁸⁵

However, Cleopatra cannot control Antony, and grants the permission he seeks:

Therefore, be deaf to my unpitied folly.
And all the gods go with you! Upon your sword
Sit laurel victory! And smooth success
Be strew'd before your feet! (1.3.99-102)

The actor who plays Cleopatra must decide whether to deliver this stunning rhetorical “release” of her prisoner as heartfelt, or bitter and sarcastic. The gushing high diction of this send-off only thinly veils Cleopatra’s jealousy, and fear for her own political and/or emotional security. However, either way, her unparalleled poetry increases the dramatic tension, before his departure for Rome, as both lovers understand that Antony’s marital status will make or break his career. Thus, Cleopatra’s, “Therefore” might signal understanding, and/or a warning, an ultimatum, or even a curse which represents the Circe / Medusa aspects of Cleopatra’s character as the Essential Female.

In another Shakespearean wink, “laurel victory” might also crown Cleopatra, herself, as the triumphant, eternal lady. Ovid’s mythological Daphne’s transformative victory over her divine pursuer also evokes Diana’s defeat of Actaeon when he invaded her private bathing bower. Shakespeare inverts Cleopatra’s humble-sounding deference to her laureled hero, so that the alert reader might hear Cleopatra lauding *herself* as the Greek poet laureate, as well as the Roman emperor, in this symbol of immortal glory.⁸⁶ Or, in a sort of bawdy reading, the Queen could be cursing his unavoidable marriage to the cold Octavia. Cleopatra might refer to her as Daphne, the rough, impenetrable laurel

⁸⁵ Laurel crowns go to the Roman emperors and gods and deified heroes, but Ovid’s Daphne transformed into a victorious laurel tree when she escaped Apollo’s rape.

⁸⁶ Also, Hercules is often depicted wearing a laurel wreath.

tree, but yet, the elusive victor. Or worse, Cleopatra's warning might allude to herself as the merciless Amazon protectress, Diana, and this inexcusable "injury" to her private "space" impossible to "extenuate", appropriating Theseus's death threat across the plays.

From her mundane point of view, Charmian dares to offer her opinion that Cleopatra is not using a smart strategy to attract and hold Antony's love: "...cross him in nothing" (1.3.9), with the opening qualifier "*If you did* love him dearly..." (1.6.6). The hearer will recognize this line as an inversion of Cleopatra's first line of the play to Antony: "If it be love, tell me how much" (1.1.14). Charmian turns that question around using the optative tense to avoid offending the irritable queen.⁸⁷ The fact that Cleopatra scoffs and performs the opposite of Charmian's advice emphasizes her confidence in her strategy of using antagonism and erotic violence to increase desire. I propose that Shakespeare revisits the Great Queen's original question to emphasize that even Cleopatra's maid does not know how the queen feels about Antony.

G. Griffiths contends that Cleopatra sounds consistently on the defensive in her first scenes: "the enigmatic female sphinx, the thorn and scourge of love, perverse, provocative, contradictory; when she opens her lips mocking, shrill, resisting flow, mood, temperament, irritating, countering, contending, wrangling, stemming the current of passion like a cold stone. It is very virtuosity, the art of Love" (41). Kott points out that "a seed of hate is inherent from the start in this mature love"⁸⁸, and "even their embrace is

⁸⁷ In Cleopatra's question to Charmian (1.3.3-5), Traci mentions that Cleopatra practiced many of the ideas of Shakespeare's teacher, Ovid. For example, she seems to read his advice in "The Art of Love" about how to keep a man. Ovid counsels, "Let the occasional No! be an incentive to vows" (XIX, 6) to tell lies and to weep at will (XIX, 33), and to "make a fool of her lovers" (II, 201). Ovid asks, "Isn't the best defense a good attack?" (I, 80) which jealous Cleopatra demonstrates in, "We will not look upon him!" (1.2.84) after sending for him.

⁸⁸ Cleopatra is twenty-nine years old at the opening of the tragedy and thirty-nine at the close. Antony is forty-three in the first scene, and fifty-three in his last.

bitter. Neither wants to give up their inner freedom; they accept love as if under duress and want to gain the upper hand over their partner” (*Shakespeare* 175). Auden explains the mixed attraction: “Cleopatra is Egypt, and Antony is one of the rulers of the Roman empire”, and “their worldly positions are an essential part of their love” (233).⁸⁹ And when they quarrel, they express real hate, inspired by the terror of eventual betrayal. Antony and Cleopatra don’t trust each other a yard” (Auden 236).⁹⁰ For instance, after his defeat at Actium, Antony calls Cleopatra a “triple-turn’d whore”, the “false soul of Egypt”, a “right gypsy”, and a “witch” (4.10.13, 25, 28, 47). Cleopatra simply asks forgiveness for all under the umbrella of her woman’s weakness (3.11.53), and Antony asserts that one of Cleopatra’s tears is worth “All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss—/ Even this repays me” (3.2.69-70). Here, he plays along with her in his own matching rhetorical style.

While Antony accepts Cleopatra’s single tear as full compensation for the loss of his lands and political honor, her second betrayal, entertaining Thidias, offends his personal honor. To counter this, Cleopatra resorts to even higher hyperbolic rhetoric to pacify Antony, including oaths to destroy herself if she proves “cold-hearted” (3.13.58). Antony reveals himself as, “the noble ruin of her magic” (3.10.18) after her third betrayal, when he does not question the truth of her suicide. He does not seem capable of responding to the Circean side of her female character. Instead of killing her, he further craves her attention: “...give me a kiss, / Even this repays me” (3.10.68-69),⁹¹ and insists

⁸⁹ See also Colie for more on Cleopatra’s political opportunism. Pg.182.

⁹⁰ Granville-Barker asks: “Can we detect a new contempt for Antony as she watches him, his fury gluttoned by the torment of the wretched envoy?” (Granville-Barker Vol 3, 83) This parallels Hippolyta’s possible silent contempt for Theseus as he condemns Hermia to a life of enforced sexual misery, at his hand.

⁹¹ If we hear, “betrays” in “repays,” we might hear the shadow of Judas, and Eve’s disobedience in the Essential Female serpent nature in Cleopatra’s character.

on assigning courageous heroism to his noble action when he begs her to “weep for my pardon” (4.8.45). His love blinds him to the lies of the woman he also knows undoes him, as, “Antony expires in his destroyer’s arms” (Barton *Divided* 121). I would agree and argue that he *also* dies in the arms of the Great Mother who creates him as a heroic figure. And the art and science of mythopoetics require that this poetical paradox of contrarities coexist in harmony in this local account of the universal story.

Dash suggests that, “In those first scenes, Shakespeare stresses the ‘natural’ combination of the two major interests of love and politics, in a ruler, with the clear intention to create a woman of political wisdom” (*Male Magic* 216).⁹² For example, Cleopatra alternates between intimate female rhetoric, “Sir you and I have lov’d...” (1.3.88-9), and male, political rhetoric: “...Your honor calls you hence” (1.3.97). Similarly, Cleopatra closes her cruel and caustic taunts on a friendly, blessing-sounding note: “Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly, and all the gods go with you!” (1.3.100). The great warrior still tries to evade Caesar’s business and insist on passion, but the shrewd queen insists that he “Hear the ambassadors” (1.1.48). He loses his temper, and again describes his dilemma around her power over him. Bloom confirms the queen’s character as, “the male projection”, or “image of desire that activates and torments most men” (*Cleopatra* 1). Blits focuses on Cleopatra’s love-games (1.3.4-11), and views her

⁹² Dash opens her chapter entitled, “Union of Roles” by citing Cleopatra’s final lines of her final exit: “Give me my robe, put on my crown,” and then, “Husband, I come!” In these two lines, Dash reads Shakespeare’s suggestion that a woman of power has the unusual opportunity of combining her sexual and political selves. Because she lives in a patriarchal society, however, she may still be limited by the stereotypes for female behavior and subject to the rules established by the dominant group.” Dash suggests that “The more powerful patriarchal ideology refuses to recognize sexual independence and political power in a female,” and “mandates marriage for a woman as the stamp of approval for sexual alliance with a man, and also establishes a hierarchy within marriage” (*Wooing* 209, 211-12).

rhetorical questions, “calculated entirely for effect”, as “erotic tactics” designed to “oppose [Antony] at every moment in word and deed” (*New* 33, 21).⁹³

While Danby identifies the lovers’ first words as “the essence of romantic love, a tacit contradiction of all that Philo seems to have just suggested” (*Adjustment* 43), I suggest that Cleopatra’s words do not profess love, but attempt to solicit Antony’s commitment. In saying “I’ll set a *bound*...” (1.1.16), Cleopatra demands proof, through an impossible challenge, or distant quest, like the labors of Hercules. From her jealousy and weak political position as “not Antony’s wife”, she continues to taunt him to hear the messenger, and shames him in front of the court for Caesar’s “dismissal”, and “shrill-tongued Fulvia’s scoldings” (1.1.26-32). Danby calls her tirade a “wicked caricature” of what the news might hold, and points out that she forces Antony to blush with anger, or shame, or both (*Adjustment* 43). Although Antony pitches his lofty romantic claims even higher—“Let Rome in Tiber melt!”—Cleopatra remains cynical in her cutting sarcasm and direct questions.

This scene reveals Cleopatra’s sharp wit, intelligence, and political acumen. However, most importantly, it exposes her intuitive ability to manipulate men. Danby notes that the first scene is only a little more than sixty lines, yet it illustrates all the main features of the play and “sets up the swinging ambivalence which will govern our whole reaction to the play. Above all there is the dialectic marriage and war of the contraries and their dissolution through union. In coming together, they lapse, slide, and fall apart unceasingly” (*Adjustment* 45-6). And, just when we are tempted to judge, Shakespeare

⁹³ Cleopatra begins, ends, and fills the play with more than we can discuss here. (1.3.21, 59, 64; 1.5.20-21, 23, 26, 28-30, 69-70; 2.5.6, 18, 62; 3.7.5-6, 28; 3.8.19, 39, 120, 127, 157, 162; 4.15.61-64, 84-86; 5.2.40-41, 45, 54-56, 73-74, 92-93, 146, 154, 169-70, 295, 308-9, 312).

flips the power base from Cleopatra in her own words: “I’ll seem the fool I am not; Antony / Will be himself” (1.1.43-44). Here, the queen states her problem: no matter what she does, Antony will still be Antony, and she will remain, in Danby’s view, “the helpless creature willfully blinding and deceiving herself, while Antony is the self-contained and calculating manipulator of her weaknesses” (44).

Shakespeare reinstates the ambiguity of the power struggle in Antony’s reply which begins, appropriately, with “But.” Danby observes that Antony, “sounds like a man who believes he is pushing when really he is being pulled: “But stirr’d by Cleopatra” (1. 1. 45). While the reply seems like it should continue with a comma, and some kind of consequential result of the “stirring”, it stands alone on the line. In fact, we might even understand it as a type of emotional stage direction, in that Shakespeare features it as a clear message. Importantly, Cleopatra’s ambiguous, “Antony / Will be himself” ends her powerless *or* proud statement about Antony. Similarly, his half-line pick-up, “But stirr’d by Cleopatra”, follows immediately, as if to answer her: “Yes, I would be playing the Roman warrior, except I feel “mixed up” with you!” Or, they both might mean that he was locked in an ascetic Roman “Nay” (1.1.1) to feelings until he found himself in “stirrings” of love for Cleopatra. She seems to understand, or, at least tell herself that she is no fool to believe that Antony loves Fulvia. He married her for Roman, or male reasons of convenience. And, she may very well know, as Auden maintains, that the triumvir also needs the Queen of Egypt for the same reasons.

However, one chooses to read its meaning, the half-thought, “But stirr’d by Cleopatra” is not a full sentence—it creates tension, and so forces our attention to the “other half” of the line Cleopatra spoke. Hers is a full sentence on its own line that draws

attention to one of the most ambiguous themes in the play: Who is Antony? Antony's answer to the question seems to echo Cleopatra's thoughts when she functions as a ventriloquist, speaking for him. Either Antony or Cleopatra might have spoken the whole connected line, as both fully understand his plight and her power over him, either by witchcraft or natural female charms. This ambiguity showcases Shakespeare's dialectical genius around the battle of the sexes. If there was not a period after "Cleopatra", we might be tempted to hear, "Antony would be his true Roman self except that he is stirr'd by Cleopatra, / *Now*," and will take care of world business, and everything else, some other time. Considering Kermode's Old Testament to New translation in relation to this love story, the first ten lines of *Antony* show that Cleopatra's power has taken him from a god to a non-man from the worldly Roman perspective.⁹⁴ However, the lovers' actual hyperbolic first lines assert their love's transcendence over all human activity, and anticipate another world to accommodate their experience.

In the battle of Actium, Cleopatra insists that she will "appear there for a man" (3.7.18), and when she retreats, and he follows, Scarus calls his master "the noble ruin of her magic" whose "experience, manhood, honour, ne'er / before / did violate itself" in "such an action of shame" (3.10.21-23). A misogynistic reading of Cleopatra's aggressive verbal attack on Antony might specifically acknowledge the gender inversion in her war game and confirm both violent sexual and suicidal acts of destructive penetration in that "unnatural" inversion. Scarus shames Antony as female. His conventional misogynistic view of women disfiguring men, once again links passion and destruction. And

⁹⁴ Charnes posits that "the lovers' legendary identities are ultimately secured by another less obvious but perhaps more powerful apparatus" (*Notorious* 136).

Shakespeare complicates any attempts at judgment with Cleopatra's excuse, when she asks Antony to "forgive my fearful sails", for I am just a woman. (3.11.53).

Cleopatra verbalizes the exact same contrariety as she dies, contrasting her epic performance as a goddess who surpasses Venus with an almost farcical role-change to "No more but e'en a woman..." (4.16.74). In referencing the Serpent of the Nile's "infinite variety" of cunning past man's thought", and "easy ways to die" (5.2.54) "with celerity", Cleopatra seems to slip out of her physical skin. In this way, she remains "unknowable", and cannot be "imprinted" or "sealed" in a tomb, or patriarchal narrative, as "defeated."⁹⁵ In fact, her embossed image appears in raised, bas relief, on a gold coin, with her son as a triumphant icon of positive, imperial power, as well as the bringer of tidings of great joy, as the Mother of God. (Redgrave 43; Luke 2:10)

Cleopatra directs the play, "as Venus did with Mars", and exposes herself as a player of roles when she punctures Antony's less self-conscious posturing in the opening scene and exclaims, "Excellent falsehood!" (1.1.40) in response to his declaration of love. Similarly, Cleopatra goads Antony into anger in the third scene, and then directs his performance: "Good now, play one scene / Of excellent dissembling, and let it look, / Like perfect honor" (1.3.78-80). Of all of Shakespeare's characters, none embraces the scriptedness and performativity involved in human interaction more fully than Cleopatra. Still, the interplay between performance and genuine emotion becomes impossible to unravel, in her, as a paradoxically 'Excellent falsehood' (1.1.42). Thus, for Cleopatra, imagining and acting, or playing the lover's role well *is* true love, and pious duty, and

⁹⁵ Colie further develops "unknowability in the female character as an aspect of rhetorical style" (206), and Mills marks Cleopatra as "The world's greatest question mark," whose secret allure and magnetism is that no one (including Shakespeare) can identify the secret of her charm" (Mills 103).

that is what Cleopatra constantly exhorts Antony to perform, in her role as his civilizing Mother. In this act, imagination “amends shadows quite” and there is no falsehood.

Cleopatra baits Antony with jealous taunts about his marriage, and Antony pretends to be able to ignore the outside realities of the war he understands that his wife, Fulvia, waged, to lure him out of Egypt while Cleopatra holds him captive. Shakespeare keeps the motive ambiguous as to whether her artful games spring from anxiety and/or willfulness. As J. Hall suggests: “Her contrived histrionics may strike the audience as infuriatingly perverse”, and “seem calculated to keep the sexual tension so high that Antony will never tire of her” (113). Colie calls her “a histrionic creature of impulse and whim”, and notes that “she stages herself at Cydnus, stages herself as dead for Antony, and stages herself for her death (193). Thus, the Queen exists as a figure of speech, almost entirely detached from time and space, except for the ironically grounding human experience of the eternal moment in sex, as death and rebirth, in her barge, with Antony.

The Queen’s antagonism creates the required mythical frame tension for Antony to prove his love by throwing off everything else for love of her. This reading contrasts Danby’s in that Cleopatra sets the relational tone, and Antony prefers the infinite variety of voluptuous battle to any “stale custom” the Roman world offers. He tolerates her verbal abuses, follows her irrational suggestion to fight at sea, and finds ways to overlook her deadly traps, if she will just grant him a kiss, or a passionately delivered lie. Shakespeare foregrounds this energetic outpouring of her passionate “excellent dissembling” with “Not know me yet?!” Like the capricious fairies, and gods of heroic excess, it is evident that there is no moral standard that holds value for Cleopatra. For instance, “Just because she shamelessly overacts her repentance for her share in that

defeat, it, by no means follows that she feels sorry” (Granville-Barker *Vol 3* 83).⁹⁶ Let Rome in Egypt melt!

Antony locates and names his reality in sexual union with Cleopatra. All else melts Rome into the Tiber, in Antony’s positive sense, rather than Egypt into Nile, which Cleopatra curses in a complementary negative rage. Cleopatra’s comment, “Sink Rome”, conveys her intention to reclaim the world for love. “Melt Egypt into Nile” foreshadows her own death, when she, as Egypt, returns to Nilus’ slime. When Antony dies, she laments, “The crown o’ the earth doth melt” (4.16.64), and later calls for “our crown” (5.2.232) to emphasize that Antony had, indeed, melted into her, and she resurrects their ruling narrative power in her final scene. Starks comments that “the male’s entrance into the female body signifies a return to the womb, aligning sexuality with birth and death” (*Immortal* 245). According to Adelman, “critics aligned with Cleopatra and with Egypt find positive value in Antony’s dissolution, explaining this melting as a union with the maternal” (*Suffocating* 1992). And, in this imagery, Starks asserts, “Cleopatra’s speech transforms Antony into a holy icon, imagined in supernatural terms” (*Immortal* 249).

One might view Paulo Veronese’s 1570 depiction of “Mars and Venus United by Love” as both playful and emasculating, like the soldiers’ fears for their Mars/Antony: “He will lose himself in dotage” (1.2.117), and “so our leader’s led, / And we are women’s men.” In this, Mars appears collapsed. In the Roman view, affection drains rational thinking and military power, and “Cleopatra’s magic” turns Antony into a “noble ruin” (3.10.18). But, in “noble”, Shakespeare couches a secret admiration for Antony’s choice of love, and hints that “losing himself” might transfigure him to “noble” in the

⁹⁶ See also Mills 97.

image of the “ruined” and resurrected Christ. The early Church fathers claimed that St. Peter’s small boat was diverted by the Mother of God to a remote peninsula in the Aegean Sea, to set aside a male, monastic “garden” devoted to her. Monastics forsake the world of women and devote their lives to prayer, sometimes after visions of her glory. This supports the idea that if both sexes could embrace the idea of the feminine in their being, there might be less war, as “what Venus did with Mars” illustrates.

Similarly, Cleopatra—as the figure of the Amazon, Venus Victrix, and Madame Rhetorica—seals narrative power in her ability to choose to castrate men as slaves, or “make” her heroic playmates. For example, when Mardian responds to his Queen’s impossible command to “entertain” her when she is missing Antony, he asks: “What is your highness’s pleasure?” When he tells her he has “affections”, she exclaims, “Indeed!” and he quips: “Not in deed, madam; for I can do nothing, / But what indeed is honest to be done: / Yet have I fierce affections, and think / What Venus did with Mars” (1.5.15-18). This brief, humorous exchange contains several larger themes. In it, the faithful eunuch claims he would do all that an “honest,” or devoted, lover would do for her, if he could. As a “great clerk”, he would “press” or “seal” her will as an act of duty *and* desire. The word “do” functions as another euphemism for sex as an act of duty (Blits *New* 45 n. 101). He takes the opportunity to express his frustrated, but powerful, “fierce” affections from his manly nature to confirm that Cleopatra, like Venus, can both raise “fierce” affections in a eunuch, and also emasculate even Antony, the fierce “word of war.” He admits he is powerless over her magic: “My sword, made weak by my affections / Would obey it on all cause” (3.11.66-67).

Both queens are clearly impatient with the poor acting of these “great clerks.” Hippolyta yawns and wishes the moon would change, so she can get to bed with Theseus, and Cleopatra changes the subject to sexual daydreams of Antony riding his horse. Neither excuses the “clerks” for “coming too short” of their heroes’ mythic sexual size. Hippolyta complains about the length of the play, as Titania silences her ass-lover’s braying music, “Tie up my love’s tongue and bring him silently.” Cleopatra orders Mardian to stop singing, “Let it alone!” (1.5.3), and refuses to let Antony speak, even as he dies (4.14.44-45). According to Blits, Mardian’s devotion confines him to Cleopatra, and he sings poetic representations of the sexual act rather than the act itself, in the story of Venus and Mars (*New* 45).⁹⁷ His experience is mediated by literature, and Cleopatra, impatient with his old stories, stops him from singing them, and brings “her Antony” back to her, “in deed” in the eternal moment of memory.

Mardian represents Hercules serving Queen Omphale, as the “navel” or “soul” of the earth,⁹⁸ and Christ, the word of humility and sacrifice of worldly, elemental power. Mardian, like Antony, and the whole community, was drawn down to the river of fertility to witness the birth of Venus, as Cleopatra in her barge, and the Mother of God receiving the Word from the Holy Spirit. She creates him as the Son of God, on that day, in both of their visions of life-giving, death-defying Love. Thus, Antony and Cleopatra’s private love is a public performance that creates a new religion of peace. Although many

⁹⁷ See Homer *Odyssey* 8.266-328; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 4.171-89.

⁹⁸ Incidentally, the “Omphalos” is the crack in the earth over which the Delphic sybil priestesses hovered, to apprehend the will of the gods for pilgrims to the Oracle. The myth contains Sybil, a Python-goddess, or priestess, in the crack, as the symbol of the original feminine force of Nature that corresponds to the Amazon mascot.

plausible readings point out Cleopatra's manipulative lies, the final story she tells for all to remember is one of humility, as the wife of the emperor.

It is also interesting to note that Mardian exposes a naturally masculine mindset of heroic excess in erotic violence, despite his physical experience as one of Cleopatra's phallus-free "ladies." His "harmless" affections which *would* harm her, fiercely, shows that gender can seem, "one way a Gorgon, and the other way a Mars" (5.1.22), or one way a "bush" and the other a "bear" depending on the angles of moonlight shining in and out of the imagination. One can remove another sex's ability to cuckold, or steal the "master's" authority, but cannot castrate desire. In this "light" interchange between the bored Queen and the passionate slave, it seems clear that Cleopatra might use Antony for entertainment as easily as she orders Mardian to sing and play billiards. She plays every man this way: the messengers, Dolabella, Enobarbus, Caesar, and even the clown, Death himself. This further suggests that, as the Essential Female, Cleopatra radiates love of life to all, and that love, for a particular individual might only exist in the mind's eye, or imagination, as a social construct, to protect pride of ownership and the orderly transfer of authority in families, and therefore, society.

Cleopatra seems to dismiss "him" and his "light" answers as an act of duty, as a master to a slave, like the "high clerks'" quaking welcome, and the artisans' inept acting for the Duke. Like the ruler of Egypt, the founder of Athens is bored, and so endures the bumbling actors, but does not respect them as men. The new Renaissance Duchess is also bored with them, and her yawn might reveal her heart for her memory of her former life with her maimed slave-boys and Amazon sisters. Hippolyta complains outright at having to listen to similar entertainment about regular people, and yawns: "Silliest stuff." In this

way, Shakespeare's Amazons cross genders, as well as classes, in their "loves", to propose that "the story" of who is in charge "shall be changed" (2.1.230). Both queens let the world know of their Herculean expectations by agreeing to marry their choices. They speak as forceful lovers who direct the scenes as ruling monarchs and forces of nature.

In "sport", Antony suggests they go out on the town, as an entertainment, disguised as townsfolk, and observe "the qualities of people" (1.1.55-56), as if they two looked on, as gods. Like Theseus, Antony wants to change war for pleasure (1.1.47-48), but Cleopatra continues to goad and push for more. In, "Hear the ambassadors" (1.1.4), "she demands that he do what she blames him for doing" (Blits *New* 22), and makes it impossible for him to answer. He consistently counters with rhetorical speeches about her irresistible beauty. Even though Cleopatra does not believe him—"Excellent falsehood" and "excellent dissembling"—she does appreciate his participation in her theater games and pretends: "I'll seem the fool I am not" (1.1.43). Cleopatra passes Mardian's real comments off as imaginary entertainment, "to fill the great gap of time while Antony is away", and slips off into imagining whether he is standing, or sitting, and reenacting her "real" life playing with him.

When we perceive Antony and Cleopatra as types of Mars and Venus, the critical pressure for a moral response becomes "less relevant" and it becomes more conceivable to regard their own estimates of themselves as superhuman (Waddington 221). Antony's sexual identity as a man is tied to his reputation, in both the literal war, and the figurative battle of the sexes. However, Enobarbus, as well as Octavius's Roman soldiers point out that Cleopatra is leading the war: "So our leader's led, / We are women's men..." Even Caesar points out in negative language of what they are "not" when he observes that

Antony "...is not more manlike / Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolemy / More womanly than he" (1.4.5-7). In this important statement, Shakespeare ensures the slow progress of the line so that the audience will attend to the meaning. The Emperor likens the lovers to each other, in an act of poetic fusion. Inverting Caesar's balanced statement, he seems to deem Cleopatra a fallen warrior, and Antony a "cold morsel", or "fragment" of a whore-woman.

Leggatt sees this interchange as a confirmation of the Roman view of Cleopatra as a usurper of his male power, and Antony a willing partner: "Cleopatra reports that they have played transvestite games (2. 5. 22-3), and then Antony celebrates his military victory by imagining himself as the passive sexual partner" (*Cleopatra* 244). Antony's exuberant invitation to "Chain my armed neck; leap thou, attire and all, / Through proof of harness to my heart, and there / Ride on the pants triumphing!" (4.9.14-16) can be read as subjection to his mistress to raise erotic tension. This moment exemplifies the stereotypical "heavenly mingle" when love for a woman spurs her lover to great military victory, and they celebrate the complementarity in natural sexual union.

Antony's imagery celebrates Cleopatra as his conqueror, and their triumph is a sexual display of armed love. She salutes him as, "Lord of lords!", and paragon of "infinite" valor on the battlefield (4.7.14-17). J. Hall calls this a moment of "procreative union" in the combination of the masculine and the feminine (134). Adelman calls it "transsexuality" which demonstrates how "the traditionally female domain of love need not conflict with male heroism" (*Liar* 95). After Antony's victorious hyperbole inviting her to ride him as a ,triumphal chariot (4.9.14-16), Cleopatra calls Antony "Lord of lords", and attributes godlike manliness to him as her "man of men" in, "O infinite

virtue” (4.9.18). She calls him by a New Testament attribute for God delivering the Last Judgment (Rev. 17:14, 19:16; also 1 Tim. 6:15).

In another example of his superhumanity, Caesar notes that Antony “didst eat strange flesh, / Which some did die to look on” (1.4.67-68). This may refer to Plutarch’s “beasts as never men tasted of before” like poisonous serpents in the mountains of Sparta, but might also be read as the serpent of old Nile’s dangerous, foreign, and maternal body. Antony’s heroic masculinity is amplified by devouring that forbidden flesh and surviving it. Connecting death and life with the Amazon-like sexual encounter of hunting and “killing,” in the sense of erotically stunning and eating strange flesh, exotic Cleopatra recalls herself as a “morsel” upon whom great Pompey would “anchor his aspect, and “die / With looking on his life” (1.5.33-34). Shakespeare gives Cleopatra ultimate power in the sexual aspect of male desire, in the fact that her beauty, alone, draws men to powerlessness in orgasm, like Medusa, the exotic dangerous earth mother.

But Antony could “eat” without dying, and, even more, his legendary appetite “grew more for the reaping” (5.2.92) since “she makes hungry where most she satisfies.” But, if we read “die” in the sense that lesser men sexually, or actually, physically expire in the eyes of Cleopatra—as the beastly snake-woman, Medusa, or a basilisk—Antony feasts and craves more. Enobarbus describes their time in Egypt where they “had a more monstrous feast” which depicts Cleopatra as Antony’s sensual banquet. Poetic imagery demonstrates Adelman’s and Neely’s view that the maternal female enlarges masculine heroism, as it adds feminine dimension to the purely male conflict. He filled her body space which became his womb-world from which she birthed him anew.

Waddington refers to “the disarming of Mars-Antony” in the first three acts, in preparation for his actual arming, and disarming, in Act 5 when Hercules leaves him, and he “fully absorbs his role as Mars” (219). Shakespeare depicts the inverted “arming” scene as an allegory, much like the paintings showing Mars disarmed by Venus and cupids, with Eros symbolically standing in for cupid, and Cleopatra, as Venus, arming Antony, as Mars. Antony is aware of his shifting role, as his “false, false; this, this,” doubles as instructing her about fitting his armor, but also hints at his distraction from warlike endeavors and sexual obsession. He returns, triumphant, and “uncaught” (4.9.19) by Caesar, but decidedly led in triumph by his “conqueror” (3.11.65), Cleopatra: “the armourer of [his] heart” (4.4.6). And in his greeting as Mars, the warrior confirms the exuberant “triumphing” of Venus (4.9.16; Waddington 219).

Shakespeare juxtaposes Antony bemoaning Cleopatra as an evil enchantress, “O this false soul of Egypt...” with calling out to his page, and also to Love itself: “What, Eros, Eros!” And then, when he sees Cleopatra and cries out, “Ah, thou spell! Avaunt!” (4.8. 30), he similarly curses her, as Venus, on the same line. Cleopatra hears the line together and asks, “Why is my lord enrag’d against his love?”, as if she is separated from the event of “his love” which causes him to be “enrag’d” (4.8.31). When Cleopatra sends false word of her death, Antony’s Herculean rage quiets, and he is disarmed by Eros, both literally and figuratively. He no longer wants to live to play the soldier again, but decides to die as the tragic lover, taught by the “brave instruction” of “my queen and Eros.”

From Cleopatra’s example, the great warrior ironically believes he learns to play a true lover’s part, as “A bridegroom in my death, and run into’t / As to a lover’s bed” (4.14.100-101). In the same way as Theseus conquers the Amazon threat to patriarchal

rule by subduing her in sexual “injuries”, Antony uses his own powerful, phallic sword, which had “slain” the Serpent of the Nile, to slay himself. He imagines, “I’ll make Death love me...” (3.8.193), and Enobarbus jokes about sexual “death” that “commits some loving act upon her” (1.2.141-144). Cleopatra mirrors this marriage at her death in, “The stroke of death is as a lover’s pinch / Which hurts, and is desired” (5.2.294-295).⁹⁹

Antony announces himself to Cleopatra as her “soldier, servant, making peace or war / As [she] affect’st” (1.3.70-71) and, after their defeat at Actium, he accuses her of deliberate treachery. Kermode calls this event a “disastrous bet”, and Kahn entitles her essay, “Antony’s wound” (3.10.35) (Kermode *Language* 223). Hughes explains that “Antony is ‘torn apart’ in the liberation of his Osirian Divine Love nature, under the ‘magical’ influence of the *completeness* of Cleopatra’s” (Hughes 316). The old warrior sheds his armor, like a skin, and emerges from the Goddess’s womb. Her magical “beck”, or “memory” of her womb echoes in his soul, and sloughs off Hercules to take on Cleopatra, for Eros itself, as his new “more tight” armourer, or “squire” in the final battle (4.4.15, 14). Antony curses and supplicates “Eros” numerous times in the next 150 lines and, in “the very heart of loss”, Antony describes the paradoxical cause and cure for death in Cleopatra’s life-giving “beck” of love, for “charm[ing]” him to his grave.

Like Circe, Calypso, and the White Goddess who rescue Homer’s hero from drowning in the abyss to his heavenly home, Shakespeare describes Cleopatra as he might Hippolyta, similarly “catching” a husband in battle. Antony’s bitter lament both blames and adores both mother and whore: “This grave charm / Whose eyes becked forth my wars, and called them home, / Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end / Like a

⁹⁹ See also Charney 100, and Colie 194, for extended discussion of Cleopatra’s equation of Love and Death.

right gipsy hath at fast and loose / Beguiled me, to the very heart of loss” (4.7.24-28). Antony’s “captain’s heart” (1.1.6) is the same important place of honor and emotional being as Cleopatra—“my space” and “my heart” (3.8.172), whose “bosom” is his “crown” and “chief end.” The “armourer of [his] heart” stands in for Eros, to prepare him for battle, and also betrays him “to the very heart of loss” when he feels sure she “hast sold [him] to this young novice” (4.8.14), the “boy Caesar” (3.8.18). When Antony returns from battle triumphant, he combines the two roles of hero and lover.

Like Theseus’s “injuries” to Hippolyta, Antony embraces the queen with a “soldier’s kiss”, as a “man of steel” (4.4.30, 33) after she arms him. Perhaps this token carries a promise to “injure” and pleasure her in the same paradoxical way, as a “lover’s pinch.” This might equate Cleopatra with Hippolyta, as the recipients of warrior’s triumphant exuberance which naturally extends to complete the male victory in sexual conquest. In this action and metaphor, Antony attempts to merge his beloved roles as warrior and lover, but is also represented as utterly vulnerable to Cleopatra’s estimations. He expresses a sense of shame, “story’d in dishonor” (3.11.67) after Actium, and his explosive jealousy against Cleopatra in the scene with Thidias. It is interesting that that scene “portends alone / The fall of Antony” (3.8.154-55), yet when he accepts the Queen’s matching violent self-curse as satisfactory, he feels revitalized to live, again, as the military commander, and vows to fight Caesar with renewed confidence. This sounds like a lover’s renewed “strength” of passion, after a rest, again, “stirr’d by Cleopatra.”

Antony turns his sword onto himself, rather than on Cleopatra, or Caesar, as Caesar had prophesied that he would force Antony to “spend his fury on himself” (4.6.10-11). This reflexive physical event functions like looking in the mirror as his own

men turn “his own” sword on him. Here, the action parallels Mardian’s plight, as “spend” is a sexual term for orgasm, and Mardian professes “fierce affections” so Antony turns his sexual “fury” inward on himself. As Hughes notes: “Shakespeare nowhere else found an image of such perfect fullness for simultaneity of the tragic and the transcendental in the unworldliness of erotic love” (318); yet, Antony and Cleopatra die in “transcendental exaltation” (318).

Bevington asserts: “Antony and Cleopatra dare to become like one another, and to cross over the hazardous boundaries of gender differences that Octavius insists upon as inviolable. Antony learns how to become tender, to weep, to be vulnerable, to yield authority to the woman he loves” (*Ideas* 186). However, Antony ascends into a new dimension of greatness through his relationship with Cleopatra, since she represents “the role of sexuality in adult life” (*Ideas* 188). Her role is to “refine”, or civilize the masculine impulse to destroy, in harmony with the feminine. Cleopatra’s “infinite variety” melted Antony’s heart into something other than what Philo calls, “armored” or “plated Mars.”

Antony destroys his world “to cool a gipsy’s lust” (1.1.9), his own lust, both lovers’ lust for power, *and* the “mutual pair[’s]” desire to defeat Caesar. In Danby’s view, the key element revealing ambiguity in the first scene is the harsh Roman judgment of dotage, or obsessive lust, as opposed to the lovers’ lofty self-assessment of true love’s highest value that follows. This imagery parallels the classical story of Mars who, physically disarmed, metaphorically loses his exposed heart to the dream vision of a goddess he finds hidden away in Vulcan’s underground furnace. Or, it may be that the bored queen, imprisoned in the monster’s cave, inflamed and/or inspired his vulnerable,

unplated heart, and blazed up some erotic excitement in the form of male jealousy.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, Shakespeare also explores his doubled character of Cleopatra as the worthless gipsy and dangerous warrior, “armed” with Antony, whom she forms to her usage in the Amazon tradition of selecting quality males for breeding and housekeeping.

Although the first scene of *Antony and Cleopatra* demonstrates the theme of private love over public duties, we never see the lovers alone together. When Philo introduces the scene, Antony and Cleopatra seem to be part of a theatrical performance. Philo conveys Caesar’s disgust in highest religious diction: “Behold and see” (1.1.13). Similarly, the angel announces the savior’s biblical nativity with “Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10-11).¹⁰¹ The directive also echoes the Old Testament Jeremiah’s prophetic cries of, “Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow...” (Lam.1:12), as a type of Christ, as well as his Mother’s grief. Philo’s “Behold and see” focuses the Queen’s emasculation of Antony, as though he were a newborn infant in her arms—or the dying Christ during his holy passion. The biblical birth and death scenes of Christ are strikingly similar to the parallel opening and closing scenes of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Caesar’s shaming attitude, through Philo, fails to cover his fear and fascination of the Female, or Love’s goddess’s (Venus) power to destroy the “vir” or “man” in “virtue.” Kuriyama hears Oedipal urges in Antony, whose preoccupation with

¹⁰⁰ Here, classical mythology overlays historical and literary in Shakespeare’s reference to Theseus’ “frantic” lover who “sees Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt.” This inextricably links war with sex, and possession of “the best” females is a natural cause for violence among males. In this spiritual overlay of the universal story, Odysseus was willing to leave earthly comforts and glory to suffer in the wars for the idea of Helen, his mature love Penelope; so does Shakespeare’s Theseus see “Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt,” just as Antony sees in Cleopatra, when he risks all for love in rotting ships at Actium.

¹⁰¹ It is also notable that “Philostrate,” or “lover of battle,” shares his name with the character in *Midsummer* who Theseus calls to turn funerals to merriment, *and* who introduces the Pyramus and Thisbe play. This correlation might emphasize how closely the lines between comedy and tragedy are drawn, and that they are set in language.

union with Cleopatra can be interpreted as yearning for the mother. In this view, Cleopatra is the idealized nurturing mother *and* the unfaithful female who betrays Antony for the father, Octavius Caesar (Kuriyama 338). Her bosom is Antony's "crownnet" (4.7.27) yet, at the same time, he degrades her as a "morsel on dead Caesar's trencher", and swears that the "foul" and "triple-turned whore" and "...witch shall die" (4.8.10,13,47). For Kuriyama, the ambivalence of Antony's heroic death in his lover's arms, as well as an infant at Cleopatra's breast, represents the erotic fantasy of paradise in maternal reunion. (344)

However, Janet Adelman (1992) and Peter Erickson (1985) have also discussed this Freudian "dream of reunion with the maternal matrix", and found it to be a positive dynamic rather than a regression (Adelman *Suffocating* 187). Erich Neumann asserts, "Although it requires the symbolic death of the male ego, it is a tremendous step forward when a feminine element—intangible but very real—can be added to the masculine ego consciousness as "my love", or "my soul" (*Origins* 204). Gohlke summarizes, "Cleopatra is the epitome of what is hated, loved, and feared, in a woman: a Circe, an Eve, and a Venus." To submit to her, or be seduced by her, is to die. She is the player queen for whom adultery is also murder. She is a non-nurturing mother. However, what she takes, she also has the power to give" (Gohlke 160). And that is life.

In this tradeoff, Shakespeare shows that both sexes want masculine power, but suggests that the only way to get it, is to lose it, in the encounter with the feminine matrix, and thus transfigure it to receptive creation. Titania refers to herself and Oberon as, "the parents and original" of the "progeny of evils" or battle of the sexes which "comes / From our debate, from our dissension" (2.1.115-7). In this "dragon fight"

between “first parents” (Neumann *Origins* 205), memory becomes the province of female desire which “kiss[es] the honour’d gashes whole” (4.8.11) or deifies the hero in a New Testament ending. Similarly, the virgin apprehended the divine message from the highest heaven that she would bear the Word of Love. The lauds from the Christian Feast of the Annunciation assert: “Today is revealed the mystery from all eternity.” The prayers continue, “Thou shall conceive a son, the Maker of all things, and the Deliverer of those who cry to thee. Thou dost bring the immaterial Light to be joined to the body, Let every mortal carrying the torch leap for joy” (Ware, *Festal Menaion* 460, 459), and, “Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee” (458). Here, “grace” is both the visitation of the holy spirit, and the Lord, Himself, embodied in the same person of the Son. The heavenly and earthly bodies shift shapes to conform to divine will, just as human lovers naturally do, in pious imitation.

According to Erickson, Antony achieves a new and richer form of masculine confidence when he stops suppressing his feminine side and fixates on Cleopatra’s “maternal bounty” (*Patriarchal* 135). Erickson holds that the lovers explore the limits of “heterosexual androgyny” together, in their creative gender-role exchange (Erickson *Patriarchal* 133).¹⁰² However, Adelman privileges Cleopatra as “the potential site of both generation and regeneration”, since her death asserts the Queen as ultimate earth mother, and her “dream” contains Antony’s “new masculinity” (*Liar* 190). Cleopatra reimagines Antony’s scarcity in her dream of full, masculine bounty which had “no winter in’t” (5.2.88). Adelman clarifies that Antony “is no less manly” for his effeminization and emphasizes that this precisely “shores up the category of manliness” (*Liar* 191).

¹⁰² For more on “androgyny” as a new masculinity, see Waith 268; Ornstein 36; Waddington 223, Barton *Essays* 39.

Wheeler posits that “Antony is reborn through the fertile womb of Cleopatra’s imagination into a transcendent image of manhood he has been unable to achieve in his life” (152). Adelman clarifies that Cleopatra’s “infinite variety” endlessly renews the appetite she feeds in the final scene’s imagery of the “infinite breast” (*Liar* 64, 205).¹⁰³ M. Hall explains that Antony gives way to his dream of the “positive Garden of Love, where there will be no contradiction between love and heroic action” (161). And so, Cleopatra births, or “civilizes,” the new masculine hero’s story in poetic symbols of female bounty.

¹⁰³ She develops this reference in the traditional symbol of Terra, the Earth Mother with a snake at her breast.

Chapter 3

Bower and Barge: Love's Paradox in the Womb/Tomb

As in the queens' bower and barge scenes, Goddard insists that "nothing less" than "spiritual awakening and redemption in animal man" is implied in Titania's poetic promise, and laments that these lofty themes of divine insight are lost in the uproarious playing of the merry and the tragical (*Vol I* 80). Cleopatra's ending speech-acts similarly mirror Hippolyta's (as the Fairy Queen) when she transubstantiates Antony's body and blood, as the baser elements, to the holy communion which purges, or burns out all offenses, as fire, and inspires or uplifts the communicants to a higher realm all together.

Granville-Barker notes that "Titania is Nature's spoiled darling when things go well; when things go ill, all Nature falls into discord. But how she has her way! [. . .] If Titania is ridiculous, we worship her the more for that. See what it means to be fairy queen" (*Vol 6* 118). Cleopatra is also a female of "infinite variety", "whom every thing becomes" (1.1.51), and her lover marvels when "vilest things / Become themselves in her, that the holy priests / Bless her when she is riggish" (2.2.245-7). In this way, she can "purge [thy] mortal grossness", and "make defect perfection." Thus, both Titania and Cleopatra figure Mother Nature.

The dazzling power of the Amazon mystique, "boys" great men while it transfigures them. The Roman soldiers forget their roles of loyal "clerks" to Caesar, and moral differences of opinion dissolve when they hear Enobarbus describe the vision of

Cleopatra as SuperVenus. This parallels Bottom's dream and St. John's Revelation concerning the Bride of Christ. And, like Dolabella's betrayal of Caesar for love of Cleopatra, the experience of Enobarbus' vision sounds every bit as religious for the men hearing the story—as though the Mother of God had appeared to him with a message. Like most dreamers, or faithful followers, Enobarbus cannot find words for his vision of Cleopatra. "She *beggar'd* all description" and, as Antony claims, "there's beggary in a love than can be reckon'd" (1.1.15). This means that language is too impoverished to accredit proper value to the supernatural figure, or story, of Love, as the human goddess.

Enobarbus's words fail to describe this supernatural figure, "That Venus." However, he and Antony bond over the dream of the queen as the Essential Female, and seem "transfigured so together" during Enobarbus' performance of her "greatness" as the Great Mother, "great fairy", or "Great Queen", as Antony calls her elsewhere in the play. This is the opposite of "some squeaking Cleopatra" whom the audience observes "boy[ing]" the character's lines. Thus, Shakespeare grounds the sexual experience with the Eternal Female in the mortal body, and earthly moment, in the sexual stillpoint. The vision of the mysterious, indescribable, infinite Woman strikes the men to verbal tumescence, or sexual "death" *together*, and they forget their duties and divisions in that shared, harmonizing moment, as human beings.

Cleopatra acts on men as both a Fairy Queen and a Medusa. She extends a vision of herself as "No more, but e'en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks / And does the meanest chores..." (4.16.74-76). Here, even Cleopatra comes out of character to admit the "beggary" in her performance as the Great Queen of Heaven. She has seen her own vision of heaven in her earthly body, with Antony as her

son and god. She follows the Mother of God's example of "poor passion" in "humble service to Love," in death to self-will, and Antony follows her example (albeit a false message) in the ideal "courage" of a "noble" woman (4.15.60). They both follow the willingly crucified Christ's homeopathic remedy: "with a wound I must be cured" (4.15.78).

In the first scene, Antony states that Cleopatra's body is his "space" and "kingdoms are clay." Her metaphor parallels his:

It were for me
To throw my scepter at the injurious gods,
To tell them that this world did equal theirs,
Till they had stol'n our jewel. All's but naught. (4.16.76-79)

Everything is "naught" which is an Elizabethan double entendre, meaning "nothing" and/or "sex." As Taylor asserts, the scepter represents Cleopatra's masculine power, the phallic sword and her royal kingship that she would throw away to regain her 'noblest' "man of men." In "this world", Cleopatra identifies the lovers' "space" in their world, as well as herself, alone, as equal to the heavenly cosmic world of the First Parents, or supernatural forces contained in Mother Nature.

Hippolyta's first speech prophesies that before "the night of our solemnities," daytime reason, in the court scene, will quickly turn to frenzied night. This night will then "dream away the time" in the green-world woods, and the hunting expedition, to amend the shadowy chaos in heavenly reminiscences of love, in the bower, or memory of the womb, in the Great Mother. Frye, importantly locates that mythopoetic symbolism in:

the mountaintop, just below the moon, where the upper world and this one come into alignment, and where we look up to the heavenly world and down on the natural cycle. The other point is usually in a mysterious labyrinthine cave, where the lower world and this one come into alignment, and we look down on a world of pain and up to the turning

cycle of nature. The mythical hero on the mountaintop “recovers his (generic, rather than individual) lost youth, as a child of Adam, and hence is in the garden of Eden, the Golden Age of Classical mythology, a lower paradise, directly below the moon, where Paradise proper begins. (*Fables* 59)

He calls the apex of the natural cycle, a “green world”, and the main figures in it have a “strongly parental aura”, like Adam and Eve, mankind’s original parents. (Frye *Fables* 62). And we have heard Titania chastise herself and Oberon for arguing, since “we are the parents, and original.” Frye’s maternal figure is the Sibyl, or seer, or prophetess¹⁰⁴ (62). M. Hall also notes that “All of the Circe figures occupy Edenic gardens centered around Venus, a positive force until the Renaissance” (25). So, in a profound vision of the eternal moment, the city and the woods, the battles, bower, barge, mountaintop, and monument, occupy the same physical place, onstage, as well as the same space in our minds. And the fairies’ supernatural powers literally interchange with the Royals, the Athenians, the mechanicals, the ancient lovers, as well as the audience.

This powerful device of poetry also functions on a practical plane, in the same way that shipwrights, wheelwrights, and playwrights conjoin like mechanical artisans to translate people from one place to another. Shakespeare’s queens accomplish that mythopoetic translation from heaven to earth, and earth to heaven. Hippolyta gives Antony a new life in marriage, and Cleopatra similarly locates and names Antony anew. She “words” his greatness to “vie strange forms”, or condemn imaginary shadows of darkness and mystery, using her imagination. She announces a new reality in hyperbole.

The women contain the men in the metaphors of bower and barge as female vehicles of love and death. Antony locates the vision of heaven in Cleopatra’s lips, and

¹⁰⁴ Examples of Classical opposition in this figure: Homer calls Odysseus’s mother *potnia*, or reverend, as opposed to Virgil’s Sibyl is Circe. (Frye *Fables* 62)

eyes, and body “space.” Cleopatra reciprocates in her location of heaven in his “kiss, which is my heaven to have” (5.2.302). Theseus claims that the poet’s eye brings the visions of heaven to earth, and Hippolyta names and locates the mystery in, “the bringer of that joy” and sweeps them all up into the harmony of “that joy.” Shakespeare recalls that memory of cosmic creation in the womb/tomb symbols of Hippolyta/Titania’s bower and Cleopatra’s barge, as we will explore in greater detail.

The phrase “Eternity was in our lips and eyes” connects Cleopatra with the *Midsummer* Poet’s eye rolling from earth to heaven, in earthly space, and also in time, between the here and now, *chronos*, and the eternity of what we see and say in love. This language carries us into the eternal *kairos* cycle together, as one divine immortal being. It has an analogue in Hippolyta’s, “I was with Hercules and Cadmus once” (4.1.117). In this figure, Cleopatra and Hippolyta blend in the universal memory of the immortal hero as his natural lover, and take their places beside them in their particular stories. In this earthly agreement to humiliation and disgrace as independent warriors, both queens paradoxically embrace the natural “toil of grace” modeled for women by the Eternal Mother of God (5.2.346).

Thus, the story of the endless and eternal cosmos is inscribed onto mortal bodies, birthed, and “shoved on”, through the small, low, dark, secret tiring-houses of the womb and tomb. Shakespeare dramatizes these mysterious, watery metaphors in Cleopatra’s barge and Hippolyta’s bower, as both womb and tomb, since the female contains both life and death. Antony and Theseus name and locate heaven in their visions of the fecund female in these earlier scenes, and Love transfigures their masculine aggression to bow, thereafter, in deference to the goddess as creator. Hippolyta and Cleopatra then receive

bright visions of their men from the high and dry vantage points of mountain and monument, in the liminal spaces of time marking changes of Fortune, such as Hippolyta's sudden event of marriage and Antony's sudden death. Both queens are taken by surprise in visions of their heroes during these events and respond as if they were hit by divine lightning.

As Venus did with Mars, Hippolyta's dream-vision of Love transfigures the dangerous conqueror, Theseus, to a docile symbol of sexual potency, on whom the lusty fairy queen dotes. In this vision, Shakespeare inverts Ovid's threatening monster, so as not to injure the Fairy Queen, and turns Theseus into harmless Bottom, so as not to injure Hippolyta. And, just as Titania contains the beast in her bower, on her terms of enchantment after her experience of sudden love, Hippolyta might experience a parallel vision of Theseus, on the mountaintop, as her superhero and dream lover. She might decide to follow him "back" into her memory, and enjoy him in the present, imagining him in his new "key" for the future. Like Theseus, Hippolyta seems to sustain an equally irrational change of heart from the rebellious, sexually violent warrior, to a harmless, even obedient female, on his terms, in his palace, and under some new enchantment.

Similarly, Cleopatra acts the Amazon in the entire play, crossing Antony at every turn. She continues to scourge him verbally, and Antony accepts this torture, and "hoisting up" crucifixion, asking only for a simple word of love and kiss of communion to ward off death, as the New Testament sets out. The Queen refuses most of Antony's requests, but the instant he dies, she receives a vision of his mythic divinity, and she is touched by the revealed truth of divine love for her in the sacrifice of his body. Cleopatra speaks of sex as the mortal experience of that eternal bliss she remembers in their love,

and her death-speech transfigures them both back to that moment of “heaven” which she claims “is, [hers] to have” (5.2.302).

In the speech-act of apprehending and uttering the “emotion”, or “energy in motion” of Love—the original Word of poetry which frames all existence—the queens meld their natural life cycle with the linear history of mortal humanity: the *kairos* within the *chronos*. Their words contain and shape the most expansive backwards and forwards temporality of all eternity compressed into the most ephemeral particle of reality: the present moment. The Queens’ language shifts dramatically after their night visions. Antony’s “death” seems to “perform some loving act upon” Cleopatra, as her own will soon do. The Great Queen is humbled, subdued, and resolved: “My resolution’s placed” (5.2.238). She understands that his answer to her initial question of “How much” is “I’ll die for you.” She seems truly awed by Antony’s mythic size when she recounts her dream to Dolabella, as a trance-like state, and sounds unsure of herself. We will return to this.

Hippolyta’s lines sound similarly tentative, but she teaches that imagination of love is the way to amend conflicts and create a new kind of peace on earth. Her change comes at dawn, in springtime, when Christians follow Nature in celebrating Christ’s resurrection, which involves both His entrance to Mary’s womb, and burial in and absence from the tomb. Thus, all four of the masculine warriors become feminine vessels of peace and overcome death in the Christian image of the original Word of Creation. In this image of Love, as an imagined ideal, or story, the cycle is arrested at its optimal point. Language was invented to try to suspend and magnify that story’s grandeur, and return to it, over and over, in an infinite variety of prayer-forms, or poetry. As Frye suggests: “The poet sees more than we see, and his art proves that he really does see it.

The standard of reality does not inhere in what is there, but in an unreal and subjective excess over what is there which then comes into being with its own kind of reality” (*Fables* 151).

For example, while the Roman world scoffs, Shakespeare’s poetry describes Cleopatra’s painting of herself as Venus, and Antony sees his world in her lap. She reinforces that image with “eternity was in our lips and eyes.” When Shakespeare brings the fairies out of the wood to bless the civil marriage ceremonies, he validates the existence of the supernatural or divine world of the imagination. Blits has identified Shakespeare’s movement from classical pagan or English folklore, toward Christian beliefs, and Homan explains: “The poet is also a lover, and in making something grow to great constancy, like giving birth to a play, the child of imagination, the poet/lover participates in an aesthetic process that parallels the natural process of birth” (89). Shakespeare makes the sails “conceive / And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind” (2.1.123-37) which, Homan suggests, functions as an example of “the poet’s art which juxtaposes two unrelated things into something new in a creative metaphor which captures reality in its universal sense” (89). Hippolyta perceives that a single story “grows to something of great constancy” (5.1.26-27). In this imagery, which “grows great,” Hippolyta seems to echo her dream (as Titania) of her past life in the company of women. Titania’s worshipful words recalling her votaress, seemingly pregnant by the “wanton wind,” like Cleopatra’s barge sails, intimate that Hippolyta might recall visions of the bower as she prepares for her wedding night. Similarly, Cleopatra recalls the barge before her mystical wedding in the monument.

Further, Hippolyta's mystical connection to the moon, and Diana, may seem strange and admirable, but "the structure of the play confirms the coexistence of the two worlds of reason and dream...It is not merely fanciful. In some way, it does exist. It must exist because it isn't purely private and idiosyncratic. It isn't an individual hallucination. It is the common experience" (Saccio *Word Part 1* 43). At the very least, it represents the peaceable company of reason and love for one rare moment when the lovers are all happily reconciled, and the curtain falls. Thus, mythopoetics smooth the course of love by simplifying, or amending, the shadows of doubt and death to pious impulse—a creative response to love. Through this lens, the queens might receive a vision of the divine order for their sex, and revise their actions to suit the divine Word in submissive creation. Thus, the scenes in Titania's bower, and Cleopatra's barge and tomb, function as parallel symbols of poetic fusion between love and death, generation and disintegration. For example, Barroll sees Cleopatra's barge as "A nautical Bower of Bliss" (*Allusive* 283).

It is intriguing to consider parallel moments across the text in relation to the concept of the eternal story. Titania's bower is a sensual paradise where the nightingale, Philomel, sings of passionate love, *and* the wise owl also hoots at the "quaint", or "bawdy" spirits that "appear" (2.2.1-26). Kermode observes the eternal story: "The golden bird will not always sing the same song, though a primeval pattern underlies its notes" (*Sense* 31). Thus, it is possible to discern either the Great Mother, or the self-effacing male, as Christ in His passion wins over Death, and as Kermode predicts in his New Testament *Revelation* of the marriage feast. Hippolyta might catch a sudden glimpse of such a feast of love in the pre-dawn mountaintop hunt with Theseus, whom she might

have lured *to herself* in the “glimmering night” in the parallel story of Titania’s fairy rades. This parallel might also outline a dream-version of the “injury” she sustains on the battlefield, which sparks a memory of past adventures or “hunts” with the old heroes.

Shakespeare’s “glimmering night” suggests the moonlit liminal space before the revelation, or “unveiling” of day, which also connotes the resurrection. This further links Hippolyta’s story to the Paschal cycle in springtime. Hippolyta talks about past lovers, in far-off Crete, at the same time as Oberon accuses Titania of luring Theseus to her through Antiope (another name for Hippolyta). Raging Titania opens the play with “jealous Oberon”, whom she accuses of shapeshifting to seduce “amorous Phillida” and “the bouncing Amazon, / Your buskined mistress and your warrior love”¹⁰⁵ in Crete (2.1.68, 70-71). And, in Act 5, Theseus anticipates the wedding night sex as “fairy time” (5.1.364), as if he remembers a glimmer of his Fairy Queen, Titania, in her flowery bower. In these misty glimpses, Love’s mysteries cause inexplicable changes.

Barton notes that “a few years before, a Titania in whom Theseus apparently does not believe, led him ‘through the glimmering night / From Perigenia, whom he ravished,’ and made him ‘with fair Aegles break his faith, / With Ariadne, and Antiopa” (II. i. 77-80) (*Impulse* 9). This confusion pictures Theseus being led by Titania, as the female force of love, or Venus, flitting in and out of mortal females, culminating in, “his buskined mistress” and “the bouncing Amazon” in reference to Hippolyta. Thus, the warring fairies depict Theseus’s Amazon encounter with Queen Hippolyta in the Battle of Athens, where she might have “taken” him captive, as she was “taken” captive. However, the patriarchal authority will insist on penning the chronicle of male authority, rather than privileging

¹⁰⁵ “Buskins” are a distinctive type of Amazon leggings (Mayor 160).

female agency in the divine comedy. Barton observes: “The life of the self-appointed critic of imagination and the irrational is permeated by exactly those qualities he is concerned to minimize or reject” (*Impulse* 9).

Although Theseus might remain outwardly blind to the reality of supernatural female fairy forces working to create him as the hero of his own love life, his actions are somehow strongly influenced by Hippolyta’s silence, as though he unwittingly hears Titania’s objections in that space. This possibility opens him to lift his law, in communion with her equally unexpected offer of creative truce, in marriage, despite his formal, party-line answer. Thus, their natural actions move them both from war to peace, because of “what Venus did with Mars.”

Barton observes that the final act of *Midsummer* is extraneous except for the tragic play within the play. The comedy is complete in, “We’ll hold a feast in great solemnity” (4.1.184-85), but the fifth act dramatizes Hippolyta’s words and amend the shadow of tragic death in the *Pyramus and Thisbe* “story told over.”¹⁰⁶ Kott disagrees that the weight is dispelled, and Nuttall asserts that it is only imaginatively suspended. The heavy rhetoric of Act 5 is full of images of death, but the mechanicals’ farce manages to “turn melancholy forth to funerals” (1.1.14), and “hath well beguil’d / The heavy gait of night” (5.1.358-9), as Theseus hoped at the outset (5.1.367-68).

Frye suggests that: “Nature to the poet is, a shrine of mysterious oracles; and in the darkness of the noumenal world, we depend less on the expanded pupils of vision than on the twitching whiskers of feeling” (*Fables* 227). In the same way, Shakespeare leads us further on by the lovers’ discussion of double vision (4.1.186-98). Olson holds

¹⁰⁶ The same important structural note holds true for Act 5 of *Antony and Cleopatra*, as the tragedy is complete in Antony’s death, but Cleopatra’s words shape the new social order in the final act.

that the first section of the play is crucial in that Shakespeare reinforces the symbolic implications of the wood when “the bright things” begin to “come to confusion” (3.1.378-87) in the dark wood of earthly life. This might also suggest that bright things were the way it was, in the universe, before jealous male egos interpreted their places as godlike “creators” rather than “created”, and appropriated female choice in the reproductive process. G. W. Knight identifies “a tempest in the heart of this play” (*Comedies* 144) in Titania’s “forgeries of jealousy” speech, and notes that: “Darkness and fear permeate this play, spangled, or shot, with light.” (*Comedies* 151). And Kermode explains that the poet “must in some measure imitate what is extreme and scattering bright, or else lose touch with that feeling of bright confusion” (*Sense* 81).

However, as illusion is related to moonlight, or the expression of the divine female Creator, “The boundaries between prayer and magic cannot be so sharply drawn, as they both operate on the power in the words” (Zaleski 39-40). And Calderwood defines mythopoetics as: “The power of illusion that translates reality into drama is the ‘word magic’ which accompanies Puck’s five love-charms”, as well as Titania’s enchantments constraining Bottom, and Hippolyta’s incantation over the story of the night (*Illusion* 514). Shakespeare gives Hippolyta’s poetry a hypnotic sound, which Granville-Barker describes, “...at times he makes sound supersede sense, the music of the lines becomes their single power. The scarce interrupted lines seem to be written down as music... this magic stuff that Shakespeare pours in our ears” (Granville-Barker Vol 6, 57-58, 95).

Tassi (1964) argues that when Enobarbus describes Cleopatra as, “O’erpicturing that Venus...” (2.2.207), Shakespeare competes and claims victory over the painter’s art

in his mythologized creation of Cleopatra as Venus. This version of Venus, Tassi claims, is greater than the highest image of Venus in Appelles' painting, *Venus Anadyomene*, or *Venus Rising from the Sea*. Tassi contends that Shakespeare's audience at James' court was not only educated readers of classical texts, but knowledgeable and enthusiastic viewers, even connoisseurs of Renaissance continental art (Tassi 295), and that Apelles' Venus has the virtue of being a known prototype in Shakespeare's culture (Deats 301).

Shakespeare limns the sensual art of "that Venus" onto his Queen of Egypt. Fawcner suggests that "in their lovemaking, Antony and Cleopatra fall into an upward eternal abyss, and thereby dislimn, or absorb death. Thus, they become immortal through sex. [. . .] The simultaneity of seduction and resistance between lovers is also projected by Shakespeare's dramatic language into the sensation of the nature of the celestial screen" (17). Empson comments that the fairies are the central characters in *Midsummer*, and the theatre should shake with jackhammers and kettle drums when they "rock the ground." These images evoke the thunderous earthquake when Christ smashes the gates of hell, as sexual penetration which results in incarnation, birth, crucifixion, the eternal resurrection of love, and new life in Nature, as the author of summer.

Shakespeare's language describes the earthly seduction of Antony, as well as the seduction of the wind into big-bellied sails, and fast-following rhythms of the oars and waves. The language describes the natural elements moving "through" or penetrating each other using sexual imagery. Cleopatra is coming to seduce and ruin Antony, and in so doing, they will both fall into eternal bliss. Fawcner explains the way the positive transforms the negative: "This type of radical disarrangement displaces the ethical problematic too", as Cleopatra's "lies and contemptible actions" bring the pair to the fall,

which is also the summit, at the same time (18). In this way, the pair, “now without hope, suddenly gains access to fall into the void of the celestial, as ecstasy and paradisaal enfranchisement in the ‘deadly freedom’ which is also the humiliating downwardness of the fall” (18).

Antony laments his fateful condemnation to sexual slavery to/by Caesar through his messenger: “My good stars...have empty left their orbs, and shot their fires into the abysm of hell” (3.18.32-34).¹⁰⁷ Fawkner states that “This predicament reflects the peculiar challenge of *Antony and Cleopatra*: the deepest abyss negates itself in greatness, incandescent brightness, the sacred.” And so, the tragic lovers “consecrate themselves in comic misdemeanor” (18). So, Fawkner’s message describes the queen’s warrior tactics—her divisive and duplicitous behaviors and betrayals facilitate the fall that merges both Antony and Cleopatra upward into the sacred space, as one, in marriage. Michael Goldman depicts “a vertical axis of tragic explication,” on which the pair “transcend the horizontal analysis opposing Rome and Egypt, duty and pleasure, and so forth” (qtd. in Fawkner 129).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ This word, “abysm” seems to be a compound of “abyss” and “chasm,” both of which suggest deep dark places into which one falls and never returns, such as one might find in hell, or in a female. At the same time, “chasm” also sounds like “bosom” where Antony found his great comfort. He demonstrates how “two opposite elements fall together into a positive, upward abyss as one” (Fawkner 17). So, this word contains both heaven and hell as the paradox of Love. As its representative, onstage, Puck’s actions reflect his symbolic character when he promises, “Up and down, up and down, / I will lead them up and down” (3.2.396-397) to both locations in the imagination, like the poet’s eye. As the female life force of Love, Cleopatra similarly hauls Antony up and down, into the abysm of death, and thereby locates and seals, or “ingraves” his character into the immortal tomb—the monument of heroes, as a fellow “male” inscriber of names. This transcendent view of ambivalence aids our discussion of the warrior queens’ poetry since it offers unusually even-handed options for motives which evade judgment of any kind. Fawkner echoes Granville-Barker when he describes “the poetic power of hypnotic excess that language can radiate when it pushes humans toward the limits of their creative and destructive potentials” (25).

¹⁰⁸ For more on this descriptive cross metaphor, see also, Goldman. And Mordecai Marcus describes another metaphor of spiritual direction which intuits the idea that love requires the risk of death and achieves force and direction “from the interweaving of the life impulse with the deathward-release of sexual tension” (277). He also proposes that “the healing force of love is connected to the acceptance of death and vice-versa” (Marcus 277). This deathward-release correlates to Mother Nature and mortal birth, and thereby connects both queens with their tangles with men in the Amazon encounter.

The Amazon encounter describes the experience of seeing a reflection of the self in the Other, which prompts an urge to wrestle with and destroy the fear of the foreign threat to personal power. The recognition of the divine Logos, or Word of Love, in the Other, leads to the pious experience of friendly communion. That power removes the fearful distance between Self and Foreigner, and the two become one. George Steiner calls this “nostos”, or “homecoming”, since it signifies a return to the original state before the separation of birth. The maternal imagery implies that the spiritual “home” is in the person of the Creator, the Earth Mother, or the Eternal goddess of Nature. “She” has many names, of which God is one, as Divine Poet of the Universe. In this way, we may understand that there is no real Other to fear. “Eternity was in our lips and eyes”, as Cleopatra’s poetry recreates the memory of their communal experience of unity.¹⁰⁹ Titania asserts that she will “purge [Bottom’s] mortal grossness” if he will join her in her bower of bliss. Theseus ironically insists that “*something*” might comfort him; this something “strange and admirable” and “of great constancy” is merely “airy *nothings*” until he sees Hippolyta’s vision, and understands his pious duty to overthrow the old law in a New Testament word of mercy.

Antony tries to excuse his affair as “poisoned hours” that have “bound me up / From mine own knowledge” (2.2.96-98). At Actium, Antony disgraces himself as a general by retreating after Cleopatra at the height of the battle: “Indeed, I have lost

¹⁰⁹ Although she is a Greek, Cleopatra, as Queen of Egypt, identifies herself with Isis and Nut, the goddesses of the sun and moon. According to Cordon, they represent the renewal of each day, as each night the sun god inseminated Nut, the goddess of heaven, and every morning she gave birth to him. In this way, the goddess is both wife and mother to the sun, and the pharaoh hoped to achieve renewal in a similar way to the myth, in which mother and wife were conceptualized identically” (from “The Rebel Queens of Thebes” in *National Geographic History*, July/Aug 2017, 44). This parallels the Christian story of the Mother of God as the divine Bridegroom’s wife and mother. Thus, sex, for the Egyptians, especially at the time of death, was a sacred ceremony the pharaohs believed would make them immortal like the gods. Antony seems to believe this when he dies, begging Cleopatra to tell his love story well.

command” (3.11.23), “I have lost my way forever” (3.11.3-4), and “Authority melts from me” (3.13.90). Bevington likens Antony’s self-diagnosed madness to the ancient Greek “ate” or “blind folly,” which means a lack of will to resist corrupting pleasures. The anxious warrior laments his condition:

when we in our viciousness grow hard—
 Oh, misery on’t! –the wise gods seel our eyes,
 In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us
 Adore our errors, laugh at ‘s while we strut
 To our confusion. (3.13.113-17)

His imagery recalls Puck laughing, as the bewitched lovers chase each other through the foggy night: “What fools these mortals be!” (3.2.115).

In the figure of the armed matriarchal female, dead-set against marriage, Shakespeare raises questions about why a man would bring one of these warriors home, and voluntarily give up freedom, as Theseus did, and, “kiss’d away kingdoms and provinces” as Antony did (3.10.7-8). What makes that vision irresistible? Kermode, Frye, and Steiner view this male “homecoming” as the soul’s Christian return to itself in the salvific womb and tomb of the (female) creator.¹¹⁰ And, as we have seen in the heroes’ first lines of both plays, Shakespeare suggests that they have already been hit with Love’s “sudden glory” and have given over their swords to their goddesses in willing surrender.¹¹¹ This action might show that the men might understand how it feels to figure powerless Other in a matriarchal society, like the experience of the eunuch, Mardian.

¹¹⁰ This female force is represented by the chaste goddess Diana shooting Cupid’s arrows of gold and lead, or squeezing Puck’s love-juice into Antony’s eyes, so that the hero sees her as now a golden Venus rising from the divine waters, and then a poisonous serpent. Theseus does this when he fawns over “fair Hippolyta” (1.1.1), who was just days earlier leading a charge to destroy him and his city.

¹¹¹ Wilde also describes the ecstatic dances of men who castrate themselves in a religious (or sexual) frenzy, at the sight of the older form of the goddess (89).

Antony is “boyed” when he is forced by his rival, Octavius, to marry Octavia, whom he has never seen, for political purposes, as most women were until the twentieth century. This shows Antony boyed by both the “boggler,” Cleopatra, *and* the boy Caesar. Kermode admits that Antony “complains against fortune: he has been cheated at cards by both the swindler Cleopatra and the lucky Caesar” (*Language* 227). Antony follows Cleopatra’s retreat from the battle at Actium, and Caesar’s message shifts all future decisions to Cleopatra, further unmans Antony, as if he were invisible, powerless, or even already dead. He is forced to read the message as a newly castrated eunuch still full of fierce affections, while Caesar invites the queen to follow *his* full sails and leave Antony to sink under the waves. This revelatory scene does seem to indicate that the play could be entitled *Cleopatra*.

In this description, Knight implies that Shakespeare refers to his other heroines, but also to Eve and the Amazons, Dante’s Beatrice, the Medusa, and the Madonna. All women of legend or literature combine to make Cleopatra. “She, more than any other, is the play.” (*Diadem* 309). Her transcendent divinity and breathtaking beauty is stressed in Enobarbus’ description of her on the barge. Knight explains that “this paradox reflects the contrast between the two theological conceptions of God containing all qualities of good and evil” (*Diadem* 309). Antony abandons the Roman code of honor to follow Cleopatra (3.10.10-24) in the same way that Theseus waives the ancient law of Athens to please Hippolyta. Both ideologies privilege the harsh patriarchal Old Testament story, and their actions demonstrate a deep and sudden change to a new, blessed outcome for love of the Essential Female.

Chapter 4

Monument and Mountaintop: The Queen's View from On High

Ruth Nevo argues that “In the (bower) recognition scene, Oberon sees Titania, perhaps for the first time, with detachment and tenderness” (69). He sighs, “Her dotage now I do begin to pity” (4.1.47) and moves toward reunion with his Queen. At that same moment, on the mountaintop, Theseus seems to identify an analogous moment of transformation in his subconscious mind, since he seems to hear conjunction in the “musical confusion” on the mountaintop. And, as I explained in Chapter 2, Hippolyta also seems to similarly intuit Titania's agreement, and imagines, “so musical a discord”, “sweet thunder”, and “gallant chiding” to “seem all one mutual cry”, like the strange and terrible erotic violence of Venus and Mars, which resulted in harmony (4.1.114-18). Her words catch Steiner's echo, and prefigure her vision of the strange and admirable night of tragic chaos, “transfigured so together” in that eternal moment of recognition.

Also, in Chapter 3, I addressed Antony and Cleopatra's meeting on the barge as a parallel recognition scene to that of the bower. In this chapter, I will consider another clear link between the plays. The foggy warring of night in the *Midsummer* wood clears up after the Athenians make love on the other side, in the dawn, which occurs at the same time as the fairy royals “rock the ground”, Theseus and Hippolyta resolve their discord on the mountaintop, and Bottom rejoins his company of “hearts” freed of his confusing enchantment. Thus sorted, they can all run to the same wedding, at the same time, unseen by each other. It is clear that this same force of love both causes and clears up the

confusion. Antony and Cleopatra experience a similarly “strange” and “gaudy” story of the night, which stands out among military marching and fighting and daytime travel logistics. It is notable because it exists in a non-specific locale, during the liminal moonlit night between battles.

During this night of love, Shakespeare inserts a notably odd scene of confused whispers in the darkness, as the Roman guards “feel their way towards each other, their nerves a little ragged,” and we hear the faint stage direction of weird music under the stage (Granville-Barker *Vol 3* 30). As he points out, the soldiers “vanish” with Hercules (4.13.32) as the music dies away. It is replaced with a flourish of victorious-sounding battle trumpets at dawn, like the hunting horns of Theseus’s triumphant “Now.”

Thus, Shakespeare uses music to signal supernatural moments, as the discordant music of Theseus’ hounds, wooing Hippolyta, fades with the sunrise to harmonious winding horns, signaling Hippolyta and Titania’s simultaneous sacrifice for peace in the universe. It feels like a New Testament Easter sunrise service. The pagan “tongs and bones” (4.1.29) music of Titania’s bower dream changes to “still music” when Oberon restores her wonted sight, and the Athenian lovers are similarly awakened by Theseus’ hunting horns. The mechanicals replace their mournful laments with shouts of joy when Bottom is restored, after his sexual adventure, and plans to sing a ballad, “at her death” (4.1.214-215). However, he does *not* sing his sad old song, because both Titania and Hippolyta call for the New Testament wedding music.

Lewis observes that the *Midsommer* hunting scene is often omitted from productions, and the lines are thrown away by most actors when it is staged (253). However, Frye asserts that “at the top of the ascent one normally attains direct knowledge

or vision” (*Fables* 62). Goddard, too, assigns great mythopoetic value to this scene: The hunting scene metaphor of musical discord and sweet thunder “is as nearly perfect a metaphor as could be conceived for this play, for the incomparable counterpoint with which its own confusions and discords are melted into the single musical effect” (*Vol I* 75). The triumphant way the poet reduces the incongruities, anachronisms, contradictions, and impossible juxtapositions, and general confusion is what makes this play a “masterpiece” (175). The hounds figure the deadly hunt, but their distant barking is transposed to harmonious music symbolizing life and hope to the hearers.

For example, on the mountaintop, Nevo claims that “Hippolyta transforms Theseus’s notion of dissonant confusion into the perception of a higher harmony:

Never did I hear
Such gallant chiding; for besides the groves,
The skies, the fountains, every region near
Seem all one mutual cry. I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder. (4.1.114-118)

Here, Hippolyta’s “sweet thunder” echoes Theseus’s “musical confusion”, and she seems to merge her own past mountaintop hunting memories with their present experience into “one mutual cry.” Perhaps it is in this emotional connection with him that “Love looks with the mind”, and she sees him as a mythical hero, as Hercules and Cadmus were to her, and decides to comply with him in an alliance. Thus, the mutual mountaintop experience somehow dissolves the “strange” discord into something unexpectedly admirable, and/or constant.

In a feminist reading, Nevo suggests that Hippolyta’s words gain an advantage over, or top Theseus’s in imagination. However, it seems highly significant that Theseus appears to initiate the hunting event since he speaks first, in what sounds like an attempt

to impress her. On their pre-wedding hunting expedition, Theseus took Hippolyta to a mountaintop, which might suggest a scene for a romantic proposal, or a way to “hunt” his queen in a more respectable way. Hippolyta might also read this scene as Theseus proving his intent to woo her in a “new key”: to conjoin and rule, in peace with the world at their feet. This reading accords Theseus increased strength and rebalances Hippolyta’s heavyweight Amazon warrior archetype. It counters the popular feminist reading when the ever-vigilant, man-hating Amazon is unexpectedly swayed by some degree of passion or awe of the great hero, Theseus. This deepens Fawcner’s reading of concomitant contrarities. The next scene seems to support the Duke’s newfound hope, and even confidence, that Hippolyta might positively accept his suit, rather than merely bear his sentence, if he continues to at least act in that same vein of the universal story.

“Sweet thunder” occurs at the same time as the fairy royals “rock the ground”, recalling the transitional part of the Amazon encounter after the hunt is called off, and the murderous will of both patriarchs is overborne. When Oberon pities his victim, and removes the curse, Theseus declares his “purpos’d hunting shall be set aside” (4.1.182), and lifts the law condemning Hermia. Here, Shakespeare signals that love has transfigured the Duke’s tearing instinct from death to love. Theseus’s question for the lovers, “How comes this gentle concord in the worlde” (4.1.146-48) reflects the concord between Oberon and Titania, and represents his confusion over his strange impulse toward female freedom, in the same way as Oberon strangely “pities” Titania and reverses his curse. In this Christian event, framed by the Amazon encounter of erotic violence, “we might see the whole history of humanity, past and future, in those lines” (Goddard *Vol I* 76).

The hunting scene provides an important metaphor which illustrates how Hippolyta civilizes Theseus when he tries to impress her with his hounds. Right after Oberon commands Titania to strike up music and “take hands with me” (4.1.84) and just before the Duke wakes the lovers with horns, Theseus calls an attendant to let the hounds go, so that “my love shall hear the music of my hounds” (4.1.105). He presents his grand plan as if Hippolyta is a delicate, inexperienced woman who has never heard the “musical confusion” (4.1.109) of hunting hounds. The Queen of the Amazon warrior hunters counters this perspective with: “I was with Hercules and Cadmus” (4.1.117).¹¹² Thus, Hippolyta features herself “as the agent of male bonding rather than its sign” (Schwarz 213). Heroic masculinity is constructed between Hercules and Cadmus *because of* Hippolyta, and she is identified as one of them, rather than being used as a commodity to trade or display. Here, she nostalgically recalls her masculine past, and acts like an agent of killing which reflects the erotic violence of Hippolyta and Theseus, as they size each other up in the first scene.

¹¹² Hippolyta’s hunting scene confirms her own male identification with other great warriors, Hercules and Cadmus. On this wavelength Brooks notes that “Theseus was a companion of Hercules in his Amazonian exploits and hunted the Calydonian boar with *other heroes*” (*A Midsummer* n. 93). In this, Shakespeare may be displacing, exchanging, or even superimposing Hippolyta in Theseus’s place in the mythical history to update it to the present story. The possible translation of Hippolyta for Theseus depicts her warrior nature longing for identity with Hercules, as well. Perhaps she sees Hercules in his cousin, Theseus, and identifies with that in her engagements with all of these warriors, but actually engages with Theseus, in the final defeat. Shakespeare’s Amazon claims that Hercules and Cadmus had been there with her, instead of Hesiod’s Meleager and Theseus, which gives Shakespeare’s hero a humiliating moment in their private hunting party. This verbal battle recalls and replays the physical war she just lost, in order to fight back and injure her conqueror in some way, before he inevitably beds her. Hesiod records that Atalanta was first to wound the beast, and so won the head and hide (Mayor 3. See also Hesiod’s account of the first Amazon, Atalanta, (Hesiod *Theogony* 1287-94; and *Catalogue of Women*, a 6th century BC work attributed to him) who contains characteristics of Hippolyta that Shakespeare might have combined with others, like Penthesileia. Mayor notes that Atalanta’s Amazonian torso and head and the Calydonian Boar are on display in the National Museum, Athens (438 n. 3). This might strengthen the position that Theseus was “taken” by Hippolyta, in the Amazon encounter at Athens. From this perspective, the Amazon tames the beast, or civilizes the iconic monster into a heroic story.

As an example of Peacham's *synaeceosis*, Shakespeare may offer a connective message between plays in the Hercules myth. For instance, when Cleopatra makes fun of Antony, who is supposed to represent the quintessential ancient hero of all times, as "the Herculean Roman" who cannot enact himself. Her words recall the farcical speech in which Bottom parodies "Ercles' rarely", as if Hercules' story has lost its significance. But, even more importantly, Cleopatra's taunting Antony with unfavorable comparisons to his protector, Hercules, recalls Hippolyta's casual response which surpasses Theseus's story. She recounts her personal experience with the greatest hunter/warrior of all time who also doubles as her contemporary hunting companion in her dream memory. This device represents Hippolyta as a military peer and past lover of Hercules.

Similarly, Cleopatra's words and tone assume personal superiority and disrespect toward all male heroes' false claims.¹¹³ Adelman contends that the presence of Hercules in *Antony and Cleopatra* suggests "the simultaneous operation of both the analogy and the discrepancy between Hercules and Antony" (*Liar* 223 n. 35). It is fitting to extend this double vision to Theseus, as well, portrayed as another one of the ancient heroes trying to top Hercules' story in a new way. Cleopatra certainly parallels the emasculation motif of Omphale and Venus, and similarly, Hippolyta constantly "boys" Theseus in the familiar dynamics of the Amazon encounter.

¹¹³ As Nuttall mentions, classical references will be lost on some. In a deep Shakespearean wink, others might see Bottom playing the mythical strongman, effeminized to a docile ass by the Fairy Queen. When Theseus says, "He might yet recover and prove an ass." (V. i. 305), the Duke refers to Bottom's performance as tragic, doting Pyramus, and his performance as the bewitched ass in Titania's bower. The wink comes when the hearer realizes that Theseus could only know that if he was "doubling" as Oberon, because he was *not* in the woods at the rehearsal, has *never* seen these players, and no one except the audience has heard Bottom's dream. Theseus would scoff at that fairy story—he cannot see the world beyond his reason.

In his hunting story, we hear Theseus retell his most famous signifying story of how he cornered the bear/boar to Hippolyta, his newest cornered Amazon threat. However, in Hippolyta's counter-story, *she* kills the bear/boar/ patriarchal threat, and thereby emasculates and kills the problem Theseus represents. In this way, Theseus becomes *just another hero*¹¹⁴ in the Amazon's crosshairs.¹¹⁵ Thus, Hippolyta defeats him by usurping his role as military conqueror, and then emasculates him by locating and naming herself as a man, *and* a woman who has been "with" the gods he idolizes. McGuire notes that Hippolyta uses the word "never" twice, and her story lets him know that "the hunting he now proposes cannot measure up to what she has known" with those other two heroes (15). Or, she might even be competing in a friendly, flirtatious sort of way, to goad him toward a stronger performance as a fellow warrior. Or lover. Most likely both. Thus, Hippolyta has the ability to torture and unman her conqueror using this effective feminine war tactic to "heat [his] blood" (1.3.80) just as Cleopatra does.

Like Hesiod, Shakespeare includes Theseus in this play's hunting party, and Shakespeare might have re-visioned Atalanta's deadly "wound" as an arrow of love shot by the Amazon Queen which slew Theseus, the notorious and beastly woman-slayer. Shakespeare's Theseus does not respond directly to her, but continues as if she had not spoken. "My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind" (4.1.118) might allude to *his own* Spartan breeding through the imagery of his hounds, or his testicles, which are "hung" like those of Thessalian bulls which nearly touch the ground, and "sweep away the

¹¹⁴ Just like Cleopatra had three Roman hero-kings, in a series, as it suited her, and so Antony could be read as just one of them.

¹¹⁵ The Arden cites Plutarch's record of the natural male jealousy of his cousin Hercules's "fame and glory" that "secretly set Theseus heart on fire" and drove him to become like Hercules. (Brooks, *A Midsummer*, 134) See also Schwarz 213.

morning dew” (4.1.119-121). In a Shakespearean wink, he disclaims his age as “slow in pursuit” (4. 1. 122), but suggests that he is “match’d in mouth like bells, / Each under each” containing the promise of the superior Spartan breeding so highly valued among Amazon warriors (4.1.122-123).

In this reading, the Amazon Queen sets the tone as unmatched, but still, Theseus tries to echo her “mutual cry” with his “tuneable” cry. His proposal, “...match’d in mouth like bells” resonates like their own harmony might—singing in unison, kissing, and/or making love. Blits observes that, in this explanation, “the individual will replaces the ancient chorus”, or the conscience of the gods, “as the Athenian exceeds the Spartan” (*Soul* 11) and love conquers war. This mirrors the fluid Egyptian choice replacing the rigid Roman army mindset, and recalls Antony’s choice to exchange his public life of duty for the private love of “a wonderful / Piece of work” (1.2.152-153). Theseus concludes his verbal performance with a lover’s promise, and actually invites Hippolyta to choose. He counters Hippolyta’s “Never did I hear / Such gallant chiding” (4.1.113-114), and “I never heard / So musical a discord, such sweet thunder”¹¹⁶ with, “a cry more tuneable / Was never holla’d to, nor cheered with horn, / In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly; / Judge when you hear” (4.1.123-5).¹¹⁷ And whether Hippolyta responds in echo of his suggestion that they conjoin, or sees something new in the mountaintop overview of the confusion, Theseus gives her the power to “judge” or “decide.” Then,

¹¹⁶ If we read this imagery as sexual, then her words parallel Cleopatra’s about Antony’s super-sized potency, like an earthquake, shaking “the orb” of her body, and/or the earth, as, “rattling thunder”(5.2.85). This metaphor extends to the crucifixion storm when the Son of Man smashed the gates of hell.

¹¹⁷ It seems significant that Shakespeare alludes to the original Theseus myth in this scene, because Crete is the site of his greatest heroic labor, and Hippolyta’s memory of the greatest heroes. Here, their competition reaches a climax, and they fall together in the bright vision of their “combined” future.

just a few lines later, he hands that same power to Hermia when he asks, “is not this the day / That Hermia should give answer of her *choice*?” (4.1.134-125).

As Auden has mentioned, Antony and Cleopatra were likely swayed by each other’s power. Blits suggests that Hippolyta “could be similarly “woo’d” by Theseus’s “heroic prowess” (*Soul* 21), and may have fallen in love with him because of his victory over her, not in spite of it. Blits ignores the possibility that Hippolyta might not have fallen in love with Theseus, at all, and that his silent “warrior love” might simply be stalling to see what he has to offer before she kills him or herself. Since the ancient laws of Crete and Sparta are traceable to Zeus and Apollo,¹¹⁸ and Theseus’s Athens supplants the musical beasts’ dying echoes with the human art of triumphant horns, Theseus deposes the gods’ authority to inspire women to choose their own husbands (4.1.178-180). This eternal moment on the mountaintop links the ferocity of ancient heroism and the civility of Athenian intellectual life.

Just as Antony gives Cleopatra his sword and wears her clothes, Theseus’s first lines hint at his similar Herculean effeminization, when he promises not to “injure” her in the same way, again. His “key” change constitutes a verbal handing over of his sword and indicates that he *will* be led by a woman. Antony admits that Cleopatra “commands” him as his “conqueror”. Even Caesar acknowledges Cleopatra’s sovereignty over him in, “Absolute queen” (3.6.11), and Agrippa remembers, “She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed” (2.2.235). Schwarz explains that “when a hero drops his sword, castration is not far behind” (150).¹¹⁹ However, in this reading of spiritual self-castration, it is

¹¹⁸ See for example, Plato *Laws* 624a1-6, 634a1-2, 662c7, d7-e7; and *Minos* 318c1-3.

¹¹⁹ M. Hall examines the theme of “emasculating relationships” in post-Homeric epics, and notes that these stories are dominated by a Circe-like figure, the most famous being Dido in the *Aeneid*. For example, when Jove sends Mercury to remind Aeneas of his mission to save Carthage, he finds the hero “unmanned” as

possible to identify both matriarchal queens and both patriarchal rulers voluntarily handing each other their weapons of war, and “‘tires and mantles” of authority, to demonstrate Venus’s larger force at work in both sexes. When Mars “ploughed her”, the goddess “beat his sword” into a “ploughshare”, in the Biblical resolution of tragedy such that “neither shall they learn war anymore” (Is. 2:4). As Venus, Cleopatra transfigures hearts and inspires rather than demands obedience.

After Actium, Antony explains how masculine force sometimes works against nature or love: “Now all labor / Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles / Itself with strength” (4.14.47-49). In this, Antony sounds like Mars, the humiliated adulterer, caught, or, “entangled” with Cleopatra, in a net trap. Here, his “very force” of heroic passion, “entangles” and disempowers itself with its own strength. No matter how forcefully Antony affirms his love for the queen, she insists on altering the focus: “O, Never was there queen / So mightily betrayed!” (1.3.24-25). Cleopatra articulates similar imagery: “Riotous madness, / To be entangled with those mouth-made vows / Which break themselves in swearing” (1.3.29-31).

Cleopatra joyfully taunts and teases Antony in the fishing game, as she talks about what she will do to “pierce / their slimy jaws” and puts a dead fish on his hook as a joke (2.5.12-13). Similarly, in her first scene, “cross[ing]” refers not only to upsetting Antony, but to controlling his attention by continually trolling herself, as a lure, back and forth in

Colie described. His sword was decorated with Dido’s jewelry, and he was wearing her purple and gold cloak instead of armor. (Vergil 2.261-64). In a parallel view, Antony imagines that their arrival after death will eclipse the classical pair: “Where souls do couch on / Flowers, we’ll hand in hand, / And with our sprightly sport make / The ghosts gaze. / Dido and Aeneas shall want troops, / And all the haunt be ours” (4.14.54). It is interesting to note that Antony’s military language imagines how he and Cleopatra will compete for power to rule Elysium “hand in hand,” rather than against each other, and use their “sprightly sport” as their weapon to win “all the haunt” or duty from ghostly armies who previously served Dido and Aeneas.

front of his eyes. And, as a fish will tire and entangle itself further by struggling against the net, Antony's "noble" passion entangles him in Cleopatra's net which "crosses", or "crucifies" him. He "mars" himself, likening himself to the caught hero and adulterer, Mars. At Actium, Cleopatra lures Antony into the sea battle, catches him like a fish with her "bended hook", and hauls him after her like a trophy (2.5.12). The warrior queen plays the man's part in this battle *and* in this erotic image. However, this poetic imagery of fighting, as opposed to lovers' sport, parallels Hippolyta's possible "crossing" of Theseus in the battle of Athens, and their similar resolution to lay down their weapons, and "take hands" in loving truce.

However, Blits insists that Hippolyta praises the dissonant war cry of the fierce Spartan hounds and never mentions harmony or concord. She seems to miss, and plainly prefer, the "musical discord", and "sweet thunder" (4.1.117). Blits states: "To Hippolyta, war itself is musical, as thunder is sweet...hers is still the taste of an Amazon warrior queen" (*Soul* 145). The "Gallant chiding", or angry barking, seems to resonate with her warrior heart as "one mutual cry." In this reading, Hippolyta has not yet decided to join in with Theseus's new key of individual voices and choices. However, Hippolyta sees that he does listen to her when she explains that it is all "the same story" and gives Hermia her voice. The new leader liberates the daughter from her ancient duty, and "now" gives her desire a voice. This action seems to attract her attention as she calls him "My lord" thereafter. Theseus acts as a god when he proclaims that they will be eternally knit "in the temple" (5.1.195). Thus, the masculine urge to destroy is tamed by the feminine, and "The barbaric becomes civilized" (Blits *Soul* 151). The tragical dissolves in mirth.

On the mountaintop, Hippolyta hears a musical memory of “baying the bear” with mythical heroes. In that moment, she might suddenly see her dream-lover in her bower as a magical fairy queen in love. She “wakes up” in the same new dawn as her dream-self, Titania, and restores all of nature in her choice to marry her conqueror, as Titania rocks the ground with Oberon, and the mortal lovers “observe the rite of May” (4.1.131-132) on the ground, and the artisans revise the old tragedy into a rollicking farce, to better suit the wedding celebration. In this reading, both Amazon warrior queens apprehend and comprehend an instance of their place in Nature and comprehend their power as females: to die to their own particular wills and serve together with the Author of the eternal love story. As we have heard, this argument follows the ancient cosmic origin of the universe, as well as the Biblical creation story. Both queens represent the androgynous Gaia, as well as the Theotokos, or god-bearer, both of whom bear the male authorities who ruled the popular myths in the early modern period.

In Zeus and Theos, Theseus and Antony replace the Old Testament patriarchs as New Testament abolishers of law. Plutarch records that they are both descendants of Hercules, and thus, cousins across the canon.¹²⁰ As Neumann explains, the individual participates in the “guardian angel” ancestor as a “second self”, and “their relationship comes near consubstantiality” (*Origins* 289). Thus, it is possible to read Shakespeare’s heroes as literary reconstitutions of the Hercules myth. They similarly collapse their masculine boundaries into their female lovers during the experience of the eternal moment. Significantly, this “concord” between Hippolyta and Theseus occurs at the same time as when Oberon wakes Titania. Granville-Barker suggests that Oberon

¹²⁰ Antony is descended from Anton, the son of Hercules (Plutarch II.6).

disgustingly stops the “tongs and bones” folk music which symbolizes the lovemaking of the fairy and the ass, and provides dramatic contrast to the “still music” Titania calls for when “harmony is restored” and her hand is, once again, in Oberon’s.

This musical resolution corresponds with the “winding horns” heralding the transfiguration of Theseus and Hippolyta’s hunting-to-wedding party. Their fanfare is “symbolic of the sunrise” and must be “elegantly symphonic” (Granville-Barker *Vol 6* 110). The dogs might remind Hippolyta of the chaotic bliss of previous war-hunts, in “the tongs and bones” of Titania’s bower with her own memorable heroes. Perhaps Hippolyta rehearses Steiner’s echo from the mountaintop, and thereby recalls and recognizes the divine in Theseus.¹²¹ And so, love’s enchantment transfigures Hippolyta’s perception of Theseus to Hercules, just as the flower-juice changes Titania’s vision of Bottom from an ass to an angel.

Like her eunuch devotee, Mardian, when Cleopatra physically raises Antony “up” to her level, she exclaims, “Here’s sport *indeed!*” This exclamation recalls, and answers, her question to Antony in the first line of the play: “If it be love, *indeed*, tell me how much.” This line also functions as a sarcastic retort to his, “What sport tonight?” In both the first line, and, “Here’s sport indeed,” the unnecessary word “indeed” stands out, and Cleopatra seems to exult in Antony’s sacrificial deed of love in answer to her initial question: “What deed will you perform to prove your love to me?” She might even ask if he will “legitimize” her with a deed of love or a marriage contract. However, in this hauling-up scene, the queen demonstrates the awkward, “sweating labour” she mentioned earlier in creating their world of love, like Mother Nature giving birth to a son who would

¹²¹ See also Vyvyan for earthly reflections of heaven in mortal lovers in *Midsummer*.

be similarly tortured and hauled up for his voluntary sacrifice of love for his destroyers, and like Mary's relationship to the sacrifice of Christ. In her analogous speech-act of death, Cleopatra offers a "deed" of "sweating labour" to answer Antony's sacrifice.

Many critics, such as Granville-Barker, have complained about the impossibility of staging the "hauling-up" scene gracefully, which I view as part of Shakespeare's purpose. The gory mess of the hero, and noisy apparatus involved with heaving him from the ground to the monument, is fitting in connection with the meaning of the event. The irony of the queen wrenching his heavy, bleeding body with block and tackle and shrieking pulleys, contrasts with the smooth, light ethereal (Christian) ascension. Cleopatra makes no effort to comfort Antony as she jerks his slashed body up the side of the stone pyramid. Cleopatra's actions in hooking the broken body to the apparatus, and hauling it up, "remodels the appraisal of the tragic closure" (Fawcner 117). Shakespeare has a far more complex, surprising, and imaginative end in store for his audience with Cleopatra's speech at the center of the final act—directing her own play, extempo.

Shakespeare's ungraceful staging of the idealist vision recalls Antony's threat to let Caesar "hoist thee [Cleopatra] up" in disgrace, "to the shouting plebeians—" (4.13.34). Instead, Antony begs Cleopatra to hoist him up, to avoid being held up in disgrace by Caesar's triumph. The inclusion of this scene enables Cleopatra to hoist her defeated fellow warrior "up" to a position of transfigured grace, "in triumph." Frye asserts that Cleopatra's own horrified question "Shall they hoist me up?" informs her actions from Antony's death forward, where "her whole strategy is directed to baffling Caesar's plan" (*On Shakespeare* 130). Cleopatra first dismembers, or "dislimns"

Antony's "rack", as the clouds dissipate into air (4.15.10), then hauls herself up into her monument, unweights herself of her earthly elements, and ascends like fire and air.¹²²

This earthly and heavenly imagery recalls *Midsummer's* poet, Hippolyta, who apprehends a cosmic confusion of "airy *nothings*" from heaven, and transforms them into the opposite, "*something* of great constancy", such as the original Word, or Logos, of Love. Markels confirms this theme in Cleopatra's poetry: "The language goes as far as language can in creating immortality for the characters—the cosmic language is a continuous outgrowth of the dramatic action, a conceptual realization of the quality and progress of the lovers' experience" (qtd. in Bevington *Ideas* 169). Chesterton lauds the playwright's theme of ascension connecting both word and action in Cleopatra's mythopoetics: "In pure poetry and the intoxication of words, Shakespeare never rose higher than this play" (14).

Thus, both plays look and move "up", as eyes and hands, in prayer. In her poetry, Cleopatra climbs out of Nilus' slime and lifts both herself and Antony into the realms of fire and air (5.2.288). Hippolyta, similarly, transfigures herself and the doomed lovers into a safe and blessed society. Thus, the elemental poetic imagery reveals the pervasive presence of a cosmic world. J. Hall mentions that Cleopatra's "final authentic climax" has already been fully established through her poetic images on Cydnus. Her body of "fire" mirrors the barge that "burned on the water", and the personified "air" that yearned to "gaze" on Cleopatra at the wharf. Now, as Cleopatra declares that she is "again for Cydnus" (5.2.228), she eludes Caesar's grasp using the same "hoisting up" action as both men had planned to torture and crucify her on a gibbet. And thus, like Theseus's "great

¹²² Marguerite Tassi notes that Shakespeare invented the term "dislimns" to signify the "unpainting" of a portrait. Adelman also uses "dislimns" to describe how Cleopatra unmans, or emasculates Antony.

clerks” as imperfect playwrights, “boying” earthly love stories, and the artisans’ parody of classical tragedy, the lovers in *Antony and Cleopatra* perform the passion of Christ. Antony’s bungled suicide, dragging himself to Cleopatra recalls Pyramus’s dragged-out, classical, farcical, “tragical” dying scene in *Midsummer*, as Christ dragging his cross to Golgotha for his voluntary self-sacrifice. Fawcner maintains that Shakespeare deliberately designed Antony’s ending as an “idealist ascension” (113). It is important to note that mortal warriors of both sexes fall far short of the legends, and require female mythopoetic help with their chronicles, to be reborn as Christian revisions.

For instance, in this poetic vision of mortal-heroic action between heaven and the abyss, Cleopatra fishes Antony out of dissolution, but she sounds irritable and cagey as she “boys” her impersonation of the Mother of God. When she exclaims, “How heavy weighs my Lord” (4.15.32), she alludes to Christ, the god-man, who took on the fallen weight of the world, or “mortal grossness” as a “demi-Atlas.” This image depicts her as the “happy horse” who “bears the weight of Antony” (1.5.21) in sexual sport, and then, also, in childbirth, like His divine Mother. The riding image also depicts Cleopatra as the donkey who was both present at Christ’s birth and bore him to death and resurrection. As early Christian icons often contract births and deaths into the same physical and metaphysical frame, a poet’s eye might even see him coming down from heaven, and emerging from the womb, *and* the tomb, and then ascending back to heaven, in the same eternal moment. This mythopoetic compression of opposite testaments into the Logos is also expressed in the simple presentation of the Easter hymn: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestowing life” (Papadeas *Holy Week* 451). So, in her similar, metatheatrical “celerity” in dying and

resurrecting through every earthly reenactment of the heavenly story, Cleopatra locates and names her vision of eternity in that stillpoint moment of sexual death in which she is also reborn.

In one of her fake death scenes, Cleopatra describes her “imminent” death as a “dislimning”, or erasing the borders that contain life (1.3.15-17). Her melodramatic line, “Charmian, cut my lace”, recalls her false and manipulative words which distract everyone from Antony’s real predicament (1.3.70). Then, later, when he drags himself back to her, wounded and bleeding out, he physically enacts Cleopatra’s words, and is hauled up by her “lace.” His lacerated insides are presumably spilling out, as she further “wracks” his body, or “dislimns” his “rack” with excruciating jerks and heaves. This scene dramatizes his earlier crisis after Actium: “Egypt, thou know’st too well, / My heart was to thy rudder tied by th’strings, / And thou shouldst tow me after” (3.11.54-58). This imagery recalls Antony’s original entrapment in her barge, and then by her fishing games. At this point in the play, Cleopatra’s monument serves as the barge/boat from which she works her ropes over various winches and reels to “catch another Antony”. In this way, she directs his lover’s heart, as well as his mortal heart, and tows them both by the strings like dying fish, gasping for breath.

Regardless of whether Cleopatra’s character is interpreted as the vindictive warrior, or the fearful, grieving lover, she might falter with the strain of pulling up a dead-weight. Kott observes: “Time is heavy” in this tragedy”, and the weight of his persona might cause Antony to deliberately, or accidentally, “fall” between hoists, further stretching his body and exacerbating his agony” (*Shakespeare* 171). Here, Antony’s words, “All length is torture” (4.14. 44, 46) can be taken both literally and figuratively, as

the “length of days,” string out his doubled pain of mind and body. Antony is Cleopatra’s prisoner, at the mercy of the warrior queen. In “the rack dislimns” line, Shakespeare might also wink at, “*dislimbs*” to provoke images of the Elizabethan torture “rack.”¹²³

Hippolyta’s performance echoes the same New Testament story as the Bride of Christ running to the wedding supper, and the Mother of God receiving Love into her womb. Titania gives up her beloved son against her will which preserves the family and the world. Theseus and Oberon conjoin contrarities in blessing the weddings, instead of continuing to tear apart. Thus, the spirit of the Essential Feminine visits them all, and both sexes end their plays in speech-acts that reflect the wisdom of the goddess of Love. The lovers stop competing and agree to cooperate in the creation of peace and harmony as a pious act of duty *and* desire.

Locked up high in her monument, Cleopatra “swoons” when Antony dies in her arms. And, because she seems dazed, and her speech changes markedly following that event, it seems plausible that her divine vision of Antony might occur in that suspended instant like a spontaneous candid photograph superimposed in Starks’s holy icon of the pieta. The line “And time is at his period” (4.15.108) connotes the end: both the genesis of “tick”, or *chronos*, and the apocalypse of “tock”, or *kairos*, at once. Frye locates these religious apprehensions of heaven in the transitional moments of mortal life, like birth, marriage, and death, and in high and low places, like wombs and tombs, in mountains and monuments.

This New Testament moment “purges the interval of simple chronicity” and “moves literature out of mere successiveness” (*Sense* 192-93). Regarding the swoon,

¹²³ This familiar Elizabethan instrument of torture was infamous for its slow dislocating and tearing of its victim’s “rack”, as Cleopatra did, perhaps to punish Antony for his sins and offenses.

Goddard suggests that: “No one will ever debate whether her swoon is genuine or not. In those few moments of unconsciousness she visits some other world and comes back divested forever of earthly royalty” (*Vol II* 585). The moment Antony dies, Cleopatra sets a verbal seal to imprint his memory in the “chronicle”, as the greatest warrior *and* lover who ever lived: “O, wither’d is the garland of the war, / The soldier’s pole is fall’n” (4.16.66-67). The “garland” or laurel wreath is the sign of the Roman conqueror, and the soldier’s “pole” suggests his lance or sword; both are symbols of phallic, as well as military might, which have now wither’d and fall’n. Cleopatra’s speech changes keys from low diction: “No, let me speak” (4.16.45), to high rhetorical eulogy to reraise Antony’s pole and recrown him with the victor’s laurels.

I argue that Cleopatra’s metaphor represents a warrior saving her fallen fellow warrior from death through poetry. Kermode assesses the mythic grandeur of her poetry, as “both mythical and holy figures elevate Antony from ordinary humanity” (*Language* 227). Beckerman suggests that “Cleopatra reaches a complete state of spiritual identity with Antony as prefigured in the first scene where his sense of love prevails” (111). Cleopatra’s verse expresses her clear disinterest in staying on in an empty world without Antony where there is, “nothing left remarkable / Beneath the visiting moon” (4.15.63-68). Kermode comments on Cleopatra’s use of “visiting” as a clue that she has decided upon suicide and will soon renounce “the fleeting moon” (5.2.240; *Language* 228). Hillman notes that “remarkable” is one of Shakespeare’s “new” words (before *OED* in 1604) and seems to validate Cleopatra’s role as true lover. Their experience of love marks a stillpoint in time and space. Through the queen’s speech, Shakespeare characterizes his Cleopatra into something similarly unique and unrepeatable, but yet as

commonplace as Thisbe dying every night onstage as a figment of imagination. And so, in their loves and deaths, the pair also “dies” or “dissolves” as particular physical bodies *and* narrative text “back” into the original cosmic lovers. In this, they become divine reiterations of the original creator.

Like the rhythm of the sexual act itself, these four scenes are characterized by oscillating, frenetic energy for most of four scenes, and now, after the crest in the moment of her quickening kiss of death with Antony, Cleopatra has time to reflect as her reasons for living ebb. Cleopatra thus continues as the unknowable woman who might easily betray the loser for the winner but is also “resolute” in her decision to die with Antony as a married pair. In this way, Cleopatra functions as Venus—the mother, or “poet”, or “maker” of all creation. Her next move is to recycle herself, as the ancient serpent from Nilus’ slime. She recreates her own story and positions it as higher than that of Venus with the declaration, “I am again for Cydnus, / To meet Mark Antony” (5.2.228-229). She anticipates this with a warrior of love’s double-delight in the “lover’s pinch” of death. And, as the mother of all creation, Cleopatra uses imagery of wife and mother. This warrior/lover rhetorical metaphor and nursing baby at the breast provides a final reiteration of the *discordia concors*. Mars and Venus’ erotic wrestling for power results in Harmony, and Venus’s Amazon encounter with Death ends in a mystical wedding and hope of progeny and peace.

Cleopatra’s verse is simple: “...this mortal house I’ll ruin...” (5. 2. 51) In production, Granville-Barker directs the Queen to demonstrate her warrior/lover’s strength when she “lays hands on the asp” and begins her dying speech with a heavily accentuated “Come...” (Granville-Barker *Vol 3* 55-6). This final word recalls the phallic

interpretation of this powerfully erotic warrior queen's choice of deadly vehicles, so close to Farrell, who links earthy sex with metaphysical translations like death, and eternity. So even when she spouts "ecstatic nonsense" like "O see my women, / The crown o' the earth doth melt...", it is glorious and musical, and serves the purpose that 'Art must improve on nature.' It gives us the reeling agony of Cleopatra's mind, and therefore, in its dramatic setting, it ranks as supreme poetry." (Granville-Barker *Vol 3* 61)

In the monument scene, the Queen of Egypt either relates the truth to Dolabella, or fabricates a vision of Antony as a god. Goddard claims that here, the enchantress disappears, and a new Cleopatra takes her place "who realizes the splendor of Antony so fully that her memory of him transforms what little of life is left for her on earth, into heaven, in advance. (Goddard *Vol II* 584) Both answers bear strong evidence for her ending as clever ancient serpent, or repentant, transcendent "new Eve" who bears the heroic "crown o' the earth" within her female mythopoetic power.

Cleopatra's final theatrical tableau stages her apotheosis with Antony, and translates them together from "whore", and "strumpet's fool", to "a pair so famous" so the patriarchs will give her a place beside Antony in their "good death." In this, Cleopatra may be understood to "word" Antony in terms of patriarchal convention; if he is a demi-god, she must be one also, by extension. This echoes Titania's spiteful: "If you be my Lord, then I must be thy lady" (2.1.64). However, Cleopatra's omnipotent-sounding, "Not know me yet?" seems to lord her power over Antony. And her similar, "boying" of Caesar is confirmed when she informs the world how she has decided to conclude this particular revision of the universal story. Either way, or both ways, it is Cleopatra who is left onstage to tell the tale, *her* way.

Beckerman explains that the rare moments when they kiss after major rifts become “the mark of spiritual union” and grow in dramatic power as the play progresses. “In the teeth of the unstable shifts of will, passion, and calculation, these moments create an impression of absolute stillness in communion” (110-11). Just after she wakes from the faint, in the “meanest chares” revision of Cleopatra, we hear her second use of the word, “resolution.” She now sounds like a high Roman soldier, as Fulvia was touted in Plutarch, as well as Shakespeare, rushing into war and death for her noble cause of supporting her husband. Cleopatra’s words “We’ll bury him...briefest end” (4. 16. 90) sound like a true lover, as well as a loyal soldier, resolute to die immediately after she does her duty to bury her lover with due respect and honor.¹²⁴ Goddard notes that “Shakespeare seems less interested in the outcome of the battle than in the nature of that force that can obliterate utterly all thought of military conquest and glory in the mind of this greatest soldier of the world. More and more as it nears its end, the play seems to rise above the earth and open out from history into myth in a cosmic sunset of imagination.” (Goddard *Vol II* 583)

Kermode notes that “Antony’s death calls forth verse of an exalted tone peculiar to this play” and that “Cleopatra’s dream imagery is like the vision of a god or an angel and might come from the *Book of Revelation* and a mythographer’s vision of the god Jupiter” (*Language* 227-28). And yet, Cleopatra defends herself against Dolabella’s skepticism as palpable reality: “This was not a mere dream; it is true that fancy or imagination produces in dreams stranger stuff than nature can contrive, but in this case,

¹²⁴ Cleopatra, however, is still dressing and polishing her lines for her “magnificent theatrical performance” (Blits *New* 208) as the supreme goddess of Nature, and does not perform this, straightway, with her dagger. Goddard and the other Romantics excuse her. Negating Murry’s argument, she will have the entire final act to speak.

we are talking about reality, about nature's masterpiece, something real and actual, not the mere shadows produced by dreaming" (Kermode *Language* 229). This attitude echoes Hippolyta's confident, intuitive response to Theseus's skepticism, and, like Cleopatra, she amends shadows of death out of her story.

Goddard suggests:

Shakespeare gives us a premonition of the transubstantiation that is to overtake Antony in defeat when he puts off the strength and renown of his mythical ancestor and the spurious claim to divinity by association, through lineage, or divine attribution. He exchanges that for true divinity of his own guardian angel, who as the Soothsayer foresaw, is the enemy and the opposite of the demon of power. (*Vol II* 584).¹²⁵

In Cleopatra, Antony chooses love over war, and Venus over Mars. The allusion he makes to himself as a sunset, in "black vespers pageants" (4.14.8), is Antony's elemental parallel to Cleopatra's morning sunrise as, "Eastern star", or magi homager to the Mother of God at his nativity, and "fire and air" in her own transcendental end. According to Goddard, "The sun when it goes down, has an alchemical power to transmute the material world into its own substance. It is the same with the great man when he dies; the world in which he had lived is lit up with his afterglow" (*Vol II* 584). This is accomplished by Cleopatra's final words in scene 14: "We have no friend / But resolution, and the briefest end" (4.14.90). This statement resounds in perfectly balanced opposition to her next words which appropriately *open* scene 15 with "My desolation does begin to make a better life." She promises that Antony's sunset will become a new day in Cleopatra's Eastern star sunrise.

¹²⁵ Goddard suggests that Cleopatra has become Antony's angel: "Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable." (586)

“My Desolation” echoes her earlier oath to Antony, in “My resolution,” which makes us trust that her hands will perform their duty *and* desire in a “briefest end” in death.¹²⁶ The queen opens the next scene with talk of “making a better life ahead,” in which it is possible to read unwavering love in a new Cleopatra. However, a more cynical reading could be of the old Serpent characteristically scheming to improve her circumstances in new ways, and slither out of dutiful death, despite her high-sounding words. Either way, she does not use her dagger and do the deed, so there is a gap in Goddard’s theory of the new Cleopatra after her dream at his death.

¹²⁶ This recalls Hippolyta’s wishes that Thisbe “be brief” in dying for Pyramus, so that she can get on with her comic ending in the wedding night festivities. Perhaps Cleopatra pities Antony’s dying for love, as Hippolyta (and Theseus, as well) pities Pyramus (5.1.282-4).

Chapter 5

Such Tricks hath Strong Imagination: Tragical Mirth in Unlikely Weddings

“Shakespeare has a theme which only poetry can illuminate, wherefore we must plan the play’s interpretation upon these terms: Poetry, poetry; everything to serve and nothing to compete with it!” (Granville-Barker *Vol 6* 115) Through the act of mythopoesis, or imaginative play, Shakespeare enables the audience to think about the unthinkable. To anaesthetize the natural and spiritual fear of separation, in the eternal moment of birth, and death, we make irrational claims of faith, such as, “Death brings eternal life of comfort and joy.” We imagine renewed bonds of love with the Eternal Mother. We assign airy nothings a local habitation and a name, and tell the story until we believe it. “We will be eternally knit”, and “transfigured together”, or “made perfect” in the act of marriage, or death. So, rather than imagine herself defeated and dead, Cleopatra creates a “new heaven, new earth” reality, in which she is married to Antony in eternal sexual bliss in his lips and eyes.

As in the Amazon encounter, we identify with the unidentifiable in an attempt to erase Otherness and consolidate chaos by articulating it into our cultural belief system as a fiction reflecting ancient, constant love. We contain it in a story, or dramatize it into heroic forms in a play. In this engagement with literature—poetry, in particular—we imagine ourselves as bonding and reproducing in the sexual cycle which results in immortality. In practical reality, Cleopatra’s lips do not have the power to resurrect

Antony, but her lips do speak him back together, recalling the Christian Romantic view. While the other darker, existential, and feminist view of Cleopatra as an unreformed Amazon differs, her poetry functions in the same way to engage the audience to believe in her own glorious end. Both plays have a parallel structure in that the queens' speeches reframe reality after similarly traumatic events that threaten personal and political power. They dislign fear.

Nuttall suggests that: "Cleopatra, like Hippolyta, so many years before, philosophizes. Her metaphysical meditation follows the death of Antony just as Hippolyta's speech follows the passing of the enchanted night in the wood" (324). Cleopatra is rapt when she relates her dream vision to Dolabella (5.2.76-100), and Nuttall comments on the enormous energy of her speech. He also observes that Cleopatra's essential sexuality mirrors her lover's in fecundity. He connects copulation with the mighty Hercules, and notes: "If there is an erotic nuance in this line, the sea in which the dolphin plunges, over and over, is Cleopatra herself" (*Thinker* 326). He further asserts that "the content of her experience bursts through her speech as glory" (326). Like Hippolyta's unifying consolidation of competing evidence, Cleopatra's positive exuberance, in the face of rational possibility, works to confirm her story as true.

On the other hand, confusion, or blurred vision, also serves to indicate a dream or divine vision. In Hippolyta's corresponding speech, the distinctively Shakespearean device was the hesitation, "*But* howsoever, strange and admirable." Nuttall suggests that "any other writer, having come up with an insight as profound as Hippolyta's, would have set about corroborating it, but Shakespeare has her immediately question herself with the word 'but.' Cleopatra does the same when she stops to ask if her audience

believes that the man she describes ever existed” (*Thinker* 327). Hippolyta similarly abruptly acknowledges that the extraordinary night experiences happened separately from those of the day, and therefore constitute a “strange and admirable” mystery to all. It seems that both queens adjust their words to ensure that their audience closely follows their progress, because of what is at stake for them.

Cleopatra, then, continues in a less offensive, optative attitude. Like Hippolyta, she defends her strange and admirable thought with the preface, “But,” and her second word returns to the memorable original conflict of her first word of the play: “if.” Here, she crafts Antony’s answer for him, to the world: “we will find out new heaven and new earth, since our love is past the size of dreaming.” Nuttall observes that, although she is still more emotional than Hippolyta, who works against Theseus from a rational position, “Cleopatra makes a last-ditch effort to see the whole thing from the outside, coolly” (*Thinker* 327). In assessing the line—“*But if there be, nor ever were one such...*” (5.2.96)—Nuttall draws attention to the word, “nor” as intriguing. He explains that “it brilliantly communicates the way her half-embarrassed thought is tripping itself up, so that it falls into a momentary excess of negation” (327). This word halts the smooth flow of the line that follows, which would not happen if Shakespeare had meant “or,” in the sense of “*But if there be, / Or ever were,*” for instance.¹²⁷ This effect jolts the reader and functions as an interruption to Cleopatra’s otherwise sing-song, magical-sounding incantation over Antony’s dead body.

This brief moment recalls the scene in which Cleopatra stalls Antony from leaving for Rome: lying and swooning and crying, while also accusing Antony of lying

¹²⁷ Nuttall notes that the First Folio contains “nor,” but the Third Folio reads, “or” (*Thinker* 327).

and excellent falsehood. While this supports a less romantic reading of the Queen of Egypt, it also demonstrates the subtle genius of her warrior skills with words. Despite the fantastical content, she tempers her tone and diction to keep Caesar's soldier's close attention, since she might need him to relate this "truth" to the world, about Antony, if that becomes necessary, as she knows that a Roman will not listen to a woman.

But Cleopatra is not just any woman, and *she* knows that, so this verbal recession seems most likely another flirtatious game to draw the man in, so he will deliver the critical information she requires. Unsurprisingly, Dolabella appears as attentive and enchanted as another Enobarbus, who delivers the complementary speech which deifies her above Nature, as well. Predictably, Cleopatra gets her way. It is important to note that, *if* Caesar did not send Dolabella back in to deliver that piece of information, to trick her into killing herself, she might be read to trick the rational Roman male playing the hysterical Egyptian female using cold, calculated powers of reason.

Another detail that evidences the darker view of the rational, confident warrior-ruler, versus the hysterical, grieving mistress, is that Cleopatra might have interrupted herself for dramatic effect—to prepare to set off the highest claims in her rhetorical spell. Nuttall observes that Cleopatra delivers "the full philosophical counterblast" "with a strange violence," such that "the mere imagining of Antony would instantly turn the tables, so that the imagined thing would become 'nature's piece', and assume the status of reality" (327). Nuttall also suggests that, while Cleopatra's speech escalates, Shakespeare sympathizes with Dolabella, in polite and grounded answers.

Nuttall suggests that another important connection between the plays might be a plural ontology. Although Shakespeare "pretty consistently avoids metaphysical theses

beginning with the thrasonical word ‘all’”, he does so in *Midsummer*: “...*all* the stories of the night told over, / And *all* their minds transfigured so together.” Again, the warrior queen’s sing-song lullaby mesmerizes the hearer into securing the content in reality like a charm. This inexplicable change, mid-speech, seems to indicate that a spell was placed over his belief system, and imagination took hold of him, like the love-juice. He acts “with magnanimous grace,” as Saccio mentions, from that moment forward. It is significant that Hippolyta, like Cleopatra, begins her short declaration of both/and/all with the same hesitation—but. Starting their speeches with this near disclaimer, “but,” refocuses the “blame” for what is elsewhere, so the hearer can feel freer to hear, rather than simply dominate the unruly woman speaking. “But” frees them all up to wonder at the power of the poet’s pen to create reality, as Theseus describes. This is the genius of Shakespeare’s gift of subtle reasoning in his queens’ warrior-power.

In addition to the fact that both queens begin their five-line, value-changing speeches with “But”, they both imagine a logical answer to the inexplicable power of words to create reality. In another striking correlation, both Hippolyta and Cleopatra claim that sometimes nature trumps art. Hippolyta presents two pieces of evidence, albeit inexplicable, for her thesis, and then explains how, “*all* the story”, “*all* together”, transfigures the minds of the hearers, coheres into a story more credible than merely fanciful imaginative figments, and “grows” or expands into something infinitely larger than our understanding. Although we cannot clearly understand, or order the notably single “story” of these events using logic, the unifying phenomenon nevertheless absorbs its “strange” qualities, in terms of fear of foreign forms, and secures itself in “great constancy” in the status of “admirable” or “deserving highest esteem.” Here, Hippolyta

collects all these concepts in the present-day love story, as well as in the greater, collective love story. This mythopoesis unites them with divine blessings of the immortals and banishes all confusion and wars between them in the paradoxically violent act of creation.

Cleopatra's lines include the same themes of a story full of strange forms, "past the size of dreaming." She announces that unremarkable Nature "wants" or "lacks" the forms which can compete with "fancy" or "art." Then, in her characteristic style, Cleopatra once again prepares her hearers for an even farther reach of her poetic creation with "yet t' imagine" at the end of the line. Here, Shakespeare inverts, and essentially pays her back for the crucial injury to her mythic pride in the messenger's "But yet" which also hung in the air to increase suspense. Cleopatra uses the same device, here, to recall her shock in that moment, and appreciate what she does to transfigure all of the world's minds, together, forever, in her revision of that betrayal. Cleopatra delivers her memorable "punchline", inviting the audience "t' imagine" Antony as he was, in her experience, and also greater than anything ever "fancied" before, such as Hercules' mythic proportions. After Antony, she exclaims that the sun might as well stop shining, for there is nothing left "remarkable."

The last "condemning shadows quite" line ties up any loose ends pertaining to messy mortality. To "condemn" is to "censure", or "banish" painful experiences, or shortcomings. In "shadows", Cleopatra might mean areas of uncertainty, darkness, or "gloomy sadness." She might refer to shadows as metaphors for confusion, or chaos, brought on by betrayal, and/or death itself. I argue that the reading which best characterizes this particular warrior queen must include every possible reading of victory

over her enemies as “quite” also implies “entirely.” Shadows might also include people Cleopatra could not shake off in her frustrating political struggle against imperial Rome, such as Caesar, Octavia, and Fulvia. In this line, she effectively banishes every shadowy “memory” of weakness which might impede Antony’s immortal memory as perfect, or divine. *Midsummer* mirrors the eternally knit couples with no memory of the night wood, chance of birth defects, or hellish infidelity of any kind.

In Shakespeare’s plays about marriage, Nuttall identifies “a sense of transcendence” which exists as a distant music, high above the flawed mortal players as “great clerks”, “becoming” their divine roles, together. While space does not permit a thorough consideration of genre differences, it is worth drawing a brief parallel between the two plays, in common words, such as “eternity.” For Cleopatra, according to Nuttall, “lips are the proper habitation of love’s eternity” and “Cleopatra admits them to another order of reality wholly independent of historical change. There is something Arcadian, and therefore timeless about their love, as she liberates Antony from the remorseless ‘and-then-and-then-and-then’ of political machinations” (330).¹²⁸

After her dream, as Cleopatra limns it, the image of Antony transcends historical time and approaches the condition of timelessness and myth. The playwright employs the idea of *ekphrasis* to translate historical people into mythic terms, such as Antony, Cleopatra, Theseus, or Hippolyta; or characters from cosmology, such as Venus, Gaia, or the Mother of God. Garber explains the process in both of these plays:

The motif of retelling the tale, verbalized in the closing lines of both of these plays, is part of the pattern of didactic or instructive dream seen as a pathway to transcendence and redemption. *Antony and Cleopatra* culminates in the realization of dream as a metaphoric transition from history to art. Its poetry, its settings, and its superlative characters all

¹²⁸ See also Sugimura

embody that faith in the irrational and imaginative which everywhere in Shakespeare separates the magical from the mundane. The emphasis is directly upon metamorphosis and transformation as redemptive acts, and upon the created artifact as it contains and crystallizes insights into the nature of man. Dream in these last plays is closely related to poetry; the magical becomes commonplace, and the tangible realities of time and space may be compressed or extended as in a dream to encompass the fables they contain. (*Spirits* 219)

In view of this imaginative act of faith, Ornstein holds that Cleopatra will live in the art she fashions at Cydnus, as her incomparable Monument. As a poet, Cleopatra writes a *legend*, and takes her place in the story, beside the figures of ancient myth. “She teaches plated Mars an artful way of loving; and she turns this demi-Atlas after death into a very god who spreads the masculine of his inexhaustible bounty over the earth” (Ornstein 96-7). The “plates” which “dropp’d from his pocket” (5.2.92), might describe how Cleopatra disarms Antony, as Venus disarms Mars’s restrictive Roman armor. It falls away from his sexual parts to free up the bountiful autumn harvest she describes, “which grew the more by reaping” and “there was no winter in’t” (5.2.92, 86-88). Once again, Shakespeare recalls the beginning, when Philostrate laments the departure of his master, the “word of war” from his former embodiment of Mars the war god. In a similar Roman soldier’s imagery, the Serpent of the Nile keeps her victim’s brain “fuming” as her “witchcraft join[s] with beauty, lust with both.”

In this reading, Cleopatra does “o’er picture that Venus” and her Antony is, “nature’s piece ‘gainst fancy” as plated Mars. As a director, and six-time player of Cleopatra, Vanessa Redgrave asserts that Cleopatra “escapes Caesar by giving up her body and soul in *an ecstasy of belief* that she will see Antony again in the world beyond life” (43). Adelman suggests that “Cleopatra’s dream is her lie in the way of honesty; it is the central paradox of the play that we must both deny it and find it true. We do not

literally believe in the postmortem reunion, but the *symbolic pattern of reunion* begins to take precedence over any literal-minded questions about how, precisely” (*Liar* 164-68). Goddard holds that: “Whoever does not feel, in however diminished a degree, a like effect within himself, misses, I believe, one of the supreme things in Shakespeare. Above all, the sublimity of the verse conspires with the action itself to produce the alchemic effect. Here, if ever, is the harmony that mitigates tragedy, the harmony, better say, that *creates* it” (Goddard *Vol II* 589). In other words, Cleopatra’s words align with the action to create the harmonious resolution or ending for the play. She moves from earth to heaven—like the poet’s rolling eye—and locates and names herself in the eternal story.

Goddard suggests that:

In the barge, Cleopatra is the earthly Venus, enveloped in incense, waited on by everything from the winds to the populace, and we cannot but feel the universal adulation. Antony is absent, and is brought in at the end almost as an afterthought. In the spiritual meeting, he is in a sense more present than she is, and she is unconscious of everything save him, her Emperor, whom she is about to meet—of him and the courage with which his love has endowed her. (*Vol II* 589)

In this view of her dynamic language, Cleopatra represents Gaia and the Great Mother of Christ, the Logos of Love. Thus, the witch, or Serpent-goddess continues to capture and emerge the victor beyond Cleopatra’s death, in the same way that the mythological Venus crocodile transmogrifies into the unvanquishable literary character who continues to take men in, by her eternal “infinite variety.” This ancient, mythically divine, and now, legendary warrior queen will naturally shed her skin to renew fresh beauty, and change names, repeatedly, in human textual descriptions, but will always be “again for Cydnus” to “catch another Antony.” In her final iteration, she commands her women to show her like “a queen” as she prepares to “shove” *herself* “on.” In this event, she avoids Fulvia’s

and Octavius's political usage by the patriarchal triumvirs while affirming her true place in Antony's life as Love itself.

When Cleopatra actually does take her own life, she avoids the word "death" and continues to play many roles: wife and mother, queen, unruly woman, and ends as a cunning huntress, or a coiled serpent, feigning sleep to ambush "another Antony" (5.2.347-48). In her, "Let the water-flies..." imagery, she uses the subjunctive to deflect the event of decomposition and emphasize the endless infinitive of immortality. Part of the mysterious ambiguity of Cleopatra's death is the fullness with which it expresses the multiplicity of her sensual female nature. She is Antony's mistress, wife, royal courtesan, mother, great queen and a simple, as well as "a lass unparalleled" (5.2.314). She possesses "infinite variety" at the same as she is "marble constant." She is also an unidentifiable, allegorical, ambiguous, metaphorical, hyperbolic, paradoxical myth. Her nature opposes decay, and she dies dreaming of life loving Antony.

Cleopatra's false suicide disarms Antony's murderous rage, and her real suicide eludes Caesar's grasping for glory. Neither man is able to destroy her, and her words can be read as tricking them both into making *her* the most notable *and* notorious character in the play-world. This is her victory. Shakespeare melds her masculine and feminine aspects in her death, when she claims she is "no more but e'en a woman", and then, "I have nothing / Of woman in me, now" (5.2.238-239). In this paradox, she plays the most noble Roman male warrior-hero, as well as the most graceful, obedient wife.

The Queen "goes about making a religion of erotic passion" (Bevington *How* 20), and surpasses "that Venus" herself, in her performance at Cydnus. Hillman observes that "it is through the *poetry of praise* that these characters are turned into idols. Cleopatra

becomes a pagan goddess [. . .] *eros* is raised to the status of a religion in this play” (315). And, according to Blits, Dolabella’s words identify him as “a harbinger of Christianity” (*New* 207; Matt. 22:37-39; John 13. 34-35). He echoes Mardian’s castrated pagan worship of Cleopatra, where his new religion is love and mercy, and he risks death for one chance to speak with her, and ask if she knows his name (5.2.101-4). The Christian audience might hear the penitent thief on the cross, asking Christ to remember him when he enters the kingdom of heaven. (Mat. 27:38, Luke 23: 32-43, Mark 15: 27). If he defies Caesar and disempowers the masculine patriarchal plot to destroy the Foreign Female threat by disclosing the Emperor’s plans to her, he personifies Antony’s metamorphosis from the principle of war to a commandment of love. In this view of the ending, war is abolished, there are no more enemies, and all mankind participates, together, in the same love story.

Chapter 6

Eternally Knit: Speak Now, and Forever Hold your Peace

Rather than waiting for an ass-man to move the play “forward”, the marriage agreement in *Midsummer* resolves when Hippolyta breaks her silence after the fairy dance. This event signals her divine vision of Theseus while Titania enjoys her lovestruck vision of the ass. She intuitively returns to her previous state, upon which “the summer doth still tend” and perceives the lovers “transfigured so together.” After these parallel visions, the female queens in both plays speak parallel answers, and all indicate strange confusion after the erotic dream of sexual injuries. Even Caesar’s Roman soldiers agree, “Tis strange” (4.3.20) when they sense supernatural movement in the mists. Hippolyta opens the post-hunting scene with “Tis strange my Theseus” (5.1.1), and insists on the mythopoetic truth as both “strange and admirable”; Cleopatra wakes up from her swoon, welcoming the “strange and terrible events” to come; Titania exclaims, “My Oberon! What visions have I seen?”; Hermia is not sure what prompts her to dare to speak: “I know not by what power I am made bold.” (1.1.59); Demetrius echoes in “I wot not by what power—” (4.1.163); Lysander gives “reply amazedly / half sleep, half waking” and swears, “I cannot truly say how I came here” (4.1.151-152); Demetrius describes the dream/story as “small and indistinguishable, / Like far-off mountains turned into clouds” (4.1.186-187); Hermia “see[s] things with parted eye, / when everything seems double” (4.1.188-189), and Helena agrees; Bottom muses, “I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was...” (4.1.1766).

Hippolyta describes the mysterious revelation of all their minds as, “transfigured” so together. Shakespeare use of this strong, religious word choice for Hippolyta is significant. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, transfigure means, “to alter the figure or appearance of; to change in outward appearance; to transform.” For Shakespeare’s Christian audience, the relevant allusion is to the Transfiguration of Christ, after his journey to hell and resurrection. where the Word incarnate became a figure of dazzling light. Perhaps Hippolyta sees a vision of Theseus, transfigured, in the mountaintop sunrise, since, like Cleopatra, she also sounds dazed and changed when she comes down. Lyons defines “apprehension” as a faculty of the imagination to grasp the mysterious and extend consciousness beyond space and time, whereas “comprehension” is a faculty of reasoning (*Ambiguity* 16). Hippolyta apprehends the situation as something “more” than she can comprehend, and articulates her sense of the situation as full reality.

Knapp posits that the transfiguration of Christ is “irreducible to either vision or cognition” and “entirely beyond either apprehension or comprehension” (383). And as we understand from the Amazon experience, the lightning bolt of love is also analogous to the bright morning sun rising—it has a blinding effect on literal and figurative visions of reality in the beloved. Thus, love transfigures both the minds and appearances of the lovers in *Antony and Midsummer*. We pity and laugh at Titania’s mad, poetic oaths which sound ludicrous assigned to an ass. “She must be blind,” we might say, or “She must be deaf” to hear his discordant braying as sweet music. Theseus’ hounds might have sounded that way when their barking reached Hippolyta’s ears, and she “saw” her hero, again, transfigured as she might have seen him on the battlefield fighting to win her. She “remembered” her Antony as “There’s *my* brave lord!” (3.13.177) after so long playing,

“not himself.” Similarly, Titania calls Oberon “my Oberon” (4.1.75) after she wakes up “in amity” with him. And when Hippolyta opens the fifth act with “...my Theseus...”, she addresses him with respect, and uses his name for the first time, which sounds as though she accepts him as her own.

Another important point is that it is not “fancy’s images” from each lover’s dream which effects the spiritual change; instead, the fact that they all had the same dream erases all confusing details of time and space or individual particulars. Because of the Queen’s perceptive “night vision” and authoritative speech-act, all of the women are literally *lifted up* off the ground, out of confusion and chaos, to share and participate in the salvific joy of her mountaintop experience. Her imaginative leap amends the threatening shadows of the night. *At the same moment*, Titania asks to hear the story of how she came to be found sleeping with these mortals on the ground (4.1.98-101),¹²⁹ as she flies up and away to the wedding celebration with her eternal bridegroom.

Cleopatra also wanted to drink mandragora to dream away the time while her hero was away, in order to see him again, sooner. She also tells Dolabella she “dreamed there was an Emperor”: a divinity larger than anything ever heard of before. Her daydreams of her encounter with love are the only light in her life, and she wants the sun to shut off to reflect Antony’s death. These events follow Christ’s transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and wedding supper with his Bride in paradise. Like the light of Christ for Christians, 30 years later, Cleopatra’s words prophesy the coming of a “new heaven, new earth” in her reunion with Antony. Her words “witness” her

¹²⁹ This story of “death-counterfeiting sleep” (3.2.364) is directly analogous to the New Testament story of Peter, James, and John, who ascended Mount Tabor to see Christ, but could not endure the light, so God covered them with a similar protective sleep.

vision for that event. Cleopatra's own final speech-act sheds her darker, baser elements of Nilus' slime and she rises like fire and air to the new heaven, new earth. All of the warrior queens join hands in their collective "witness" of self-sacrifice in marriage. While this concept of poetic transfiguration can be viewed through many lenses, there are two main perspectives: Christian and secular. While these diverge, the universal theme in both is the same: loss of self as a form of dying for another in the experience of love. In the common experience of this paradoxically "strange and admirable" mystery, all minds are transfigured so together.

Knapp suggests that "Hippolyta's characterization of the strange events suggests that it is precisely in the paradoxical relationship between apprehension and comprehension that one can experience the truth of the lovers' transformation" (383). However, there is another, larger perspective that smooths each particular struggling course of love into a New Testament—a salvific version of the ancient struggle which promises an end to the tragic cycle. Each lover is his own epic hero in the image of the creator, who saves his people by participating in the holy vision of family. The ancient and new story is "told over", as it has been since the Poet of Heaven spoke the cosmos into existence, and the Logos, or Word of Love, holds it all together. Hippolyta sees the power of the "whole story" as more important than any individual particularities.

The Amazon Queen's "night vision", or her ability to see light through darkness and interpret clarity through confusion, helps her to hear and transpose discord to concord. She is not forceful, and in "howsoever", she sounds as wonderstruck as the rest of the party over how these things happened. But she does speak, after she has obviously been thinking about the situation during her/their wedding ceremonies. The fact that

Shakespeare avoids formal religious rites, which emphasizes the more central theme of practical love between people as a greater witness of love than fanciful images, or practices within a specific church tradition. She also ignores Theseus's jokes about creatures coupling in the wood, just as his shadow-self, Oberon, is doing with Titania as he delivers his lines.

Hippolyta's suggestion of telling the old story again adds a dimension of phenomenology to Shakespeare's images, as extensions of the physically sighted eye, to the minds' eye of each lover, as well as the whole group experience. Hippolyta encourages Theseus to look past his "cool reason" and trust the "shaping fantasies" or dreams that he has, just seconds ago, admitted as the "more" of the spirit world which lovers might apprehend "more" than others (5.1.5-6). These perceptions of "joy" and "fear" are not simply "tricks" of a "strong" enemy of ordered reason called "imagination", as he scoffs. Frye clarifies that Theseus uses "imagination" in the sense of "imaginary", to discredit an illusion as something that "isn't."

This means that the imagination apprehends the divine, and creates, or locates and names, earthly reflections of "that joy." Theseus even identifies a specific delusion of such madmen as lovers who entertain such tricks and "apprehend some joy", and thereafter "comprehend some bringer of that joy." In this image, he admits and complains that his experience of imagination has assigned joy and fear to some unseen "bringer" he cannot control. As a ruler of a civilized order and law, he is unwilling to accept an invisible competitor into the battlefield of his mind. Although he admits that it happens, he is suspicious of being duped into believing in his own emotions of joy, and fearful of "some" antic fairy power taking over his logical mind with seething brains which might

be easily misconstrued as “real” and threaten personal and civil security. He believes his mind can comprehend truth, and that reason discerns its bringer.

In a unique speech that does not simply balance or oppose Theseus’s speech, Hippolyta reveals her engagement with another world. Knapp explains that “the phenomenal world is embodied and invested rather than abstract and detached” (Knapp 383). I suggest that, in this description of the two complementary, opposite values of masculine reason and feminine desire, it is important to note that it seems that the spirit world of imagination would be described as abstract and detached, and the practical civilized world of order would be deemed embodied and invested. Knapp’s distinction inverts this order, indicating that the “real” experience of love is located and named in the embodied and invested heavenly *female* realms, where the antic fables and fairy toys are told. This leaves masculine reason represented as abstract and detached—lost, unidentified, and dislocated from reality, ironically floating like “airy nothings” lost in space. This reading locates the will in the female body and makes Hippolyta the open-minded observer who can receive the positive solution of faith necessary to save the people even if no one comprehends it. Shakespeare presents this image in opposition to that of Theseus as the negative know-it-all who pretends he can comprehend and contain inscrutable mysteries, as well as define the ineffable as a devilish trick of speech.

Perhaps because of the ancient belief that dreams are private desires and fears, and waking reality is shared responsibility or civic duty, the queen does *not* argue with Theseus about the strangeness of the lovers’ common story. This is exactly why she urges him to believe it. Whereas Theseus insists on “one or the other” thinking, and so dismisses all “fancy’s images.” Hippolyta can see both sides at once, and calls the

common experience both “strange and admirable.” She argues, “The consistency of the lovers’ story attests to the story’s substance” (Blits *Soul* 168). Their hunt caught the lovers between dreaming and waking, at the liminal edge of the night and day, and the physical edge of the woods and the city. The Amazon Queen sees and advocates for the lovers’ combined dream of joining individual choice with the social ordering of that desire in civil marriage. The Duke chooses a mockery of the ancient tragedy of love and war, in *Pyramus and Thisbe*, to demonstrate that he has defeated that “regime.” That story has been revised to a triumphant ending of Love over betrayal and death.

The audience may choose to insert Christ and his Bride, or Theseus and Hippolyta as the new key—the Natural “parents and original” of that chaos-to-constancy story cycle. That is a matter of individual choice. And, in Shakespeare’s genius, whether an audience chooses to interpret this relational mode as Love, or God’s will, the eternal story can represent both at the same time. Even if an audience chooses to understand creative cosmic consciousness as the ancient patriarchal force of rules and punishments, as the feminist and misogynist critics both do, Shakespeare presents love’s force as being as strong as that of war. This play opens the curtain on the end of a war and ends with a hopeful start of another creation cycle in the marriages. Hippolyta, however, acts the authority in this pivotal scene. Despite his pompous bluster, the Queen commands the space.

Meanwhile, the eternal story continues to evolve as half-dazed lovers emerge from their experiences, unsure of their perceptions of what happened: “When they next wake, all this derision / Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision” (3.2.370-371). The realignments of love wrought by the dream-drama of the night do not simply disappear at

dawn, any more than the fairies do, as Oberon notes (3.2.388). The confusion of visions in the foggy wood begin to clear up all together, to emphasize Hippolyta's final narrative power. However, before that revelation, Titania ends her scene by asking Oberon to interpret the experience for her as he has re-drugged her out of her jealous quarrel and sexual fantasy into patriarchal obedience:

Come, my lord, and in our flight
Tell me how it came this night
 That I sleeping here was found
 With these mortals on the ground. (4.1.98-101)

However, Oberon does not comply, but simply orders Titania to "take hands" and "rock the ground" together, "new in amity" (4.1.84, 86).

They resume their supernatural fairy dance of love which reorders the earthly harmony, and then they fly away to bless the wedding beds of the mortal lovers. When the King removes the curse, "the pairs of faithful mortals be / Wedded with Theseus, all in jollity" (4.1.90-91). Bottom's "most rare vision" ends this scene with a similarly foggy recollection of the transfiguring Logos in his love story: "It is past the wit of man to say...or his heart to report..." (4.1.209), and "I will tell you all another time..." (4.2.216). Like Theseus, Bottom does not clearly understand or believe what he might have experienced in his mind. Bottom shrugs it off and tells his company to hurry to the Duke's palace for the wedding feast: "I am to discourse wonders, but ask me / not what / .../ No more words. Away, go, away!" (4.2.25-6, 40). This pun on "discourse" recalls Bottom's recent statement: "The *course* of true love never did run smooth." And so, in the doubled sense of "discourse" as a verb, or functional shift, Shakespeare might suggest that: if we "tell the story" together, as poets who convey visions of eternity or "wonders"

of heavenly love “from heaven to earth”, perhaps “our” collective New Testament can transfigure the “dis”, or tragic “dys” separations which threaten peace.

The four young lovers emerge from their “death-counterfeiting sleep” (3.2.364), or hellish dream of disconnection from the heavenly love they had imagined, and, like Titania, their spokesman “cannot say” how they came to be lying there “on the ground.” Significantly, and at exactly the same time, the Duke voices surprisingly similar words when he shrugs off the lovers’ strange story: “Of this discourse we shall hear more anon, / Away with us to Athens!” (4.1.178, 184). Demetrius complies: “Let’s follow him, / And by the way let us recount our dreams” (4.1.202-203). However, *again*, they do not articulate their story. So, the Fairy King and Queen fly away from the same literal and figurative time and place where Bottom awakens from his dream with Titania, and gathers his company, along with the Duke, who hurries the three couples to the wedding.¹³⁰ They are *all* running or flying to the wedding feast, which will knit them together in this world and the next—in the time being, and the time to come.

Simultaneous Dreams

An astute reader will note the concomitant confusion of lovers in the woods, tearing around and acting like wild beasts, trying to kill each other. The reader might well wonder whether Theseus and Hippolyta somehow hear Oberon and Titania resolve their jealous rages in their musical dance of “new amity” or sexual reconciliation which also “rock[s] the ground”, and follow their lead, in natural harmony. Perhaps, in the

¹³⁰ The fairy quarrel centers around the parallel interplay between Titania and Theseus, as well as Hippolyta and Oberon. In this metadramatic way, the fairies do inspire and beget “their own” mortal progeny, as the love between Venus and Mars inspires Harmony. Emma Rice’s Globe production and Green’s ideas suggest many more “preposterous” couplings which highlight the subversion of patriarchal conventions in this play.

naturalist reading, there is no reason in any of their words, or so-called rational actions. But it is Hippolyta's gentle but conclusive mid-play rebuttal to Theseus's relapse, or true confession, when he famously scoffs at imagination which overturns his political decision to effect conjunction in all three couples.

When Titania wonders how she is "found with these mortals on the ground" she may be equating her story of magical enchantment with theirs, since the events occurred at the same time. And, if Hippolyta and Theseus hear the discord of the hunting hounds turn to "conjunction" in "one mutual cry" when Oberon and Titania make love, that might explain the Duke's sudden change of heart to overbear Egeus. Amazed, the Duke asks the lovers how they came by their "gentle concord", "to sleep by hate, and fear no enmity", and they seem equally confused: in a liminal state between waking and sleeping. Nevertheless, all four couples find themselves sorted because of Oberon's forced compliance of Titania. In this reading, the fairy queen's resistance remains constant. So, if Titania reveals Hippolyta's Amazon heart, then the only plausible reading of Hippolyta's "concord" is that she is simultaneously struck by Cupid's golden arrow when Titania is drugged. In this reading, "Things base and vile, holding no quantity, / Love can transpose to form and dignity" (1.1.232-33). So, she sees the donkey as an angel of peace.

The fairy queen's passionate (drugged) reaction to the ass in front of her might somehow "translate" Hippolyta's expected rational response to being forced to love an ass, which might resemble murder or suicide. This makes logical sense in that the transformation of both might have happened at the same time, as evidenced by Shakespeare's subtle, structural clues. Especially if one of Cupid's arrows struck Hippolyta, but the reaction occurs in Titania, as the Amazon's subconscious mind. It is

possible to read this “translation” as the effect of love, in her decision to marry rather than taking the noble (and expected) warrior action to kill herself and/or Theseus. Shakespeare references the Amazon Queen through Titania’s defiant resolution, “Not for your fairy kingdom!”, and Oberon’s, “Proud Titania.” In this reading, both women are forced by Oberon’s biological, misogynistic, militant feminist, and patriarchal hegemony: to accept and comply with the actions of men. Oberon directs all objectionable women to containment in their wedding beds—“*ever* true in loving be”—meaning even *beyond* death (5.1.399). And yet, feminists must not dismiss Oberon as simply a cruel, misogynist patriarchal ass, because the Fairy King demonstrates compassion for women wronged by love when he protects Helena’s feelings in the woods, and appears to feel “pity” for Titania, after his own cruel humiliation. Significantly, at that time, Theseus also happens to defend Hermia’s choice, as though he heard Oberon’s “pity.”

This reading is also evidenced by the physical rushing of Bottom and Theseus (with Oberon orchestrating) to the palace, at the same time, saying the same words, about their same, inexplicable love stories. Oberon directs: “Sound, music!... / There shall the pairs of faithful lovers be / Wedded, with Theseus, all in jollity”, and exhorts all to “take hands” in “new amity.” And similarly, Theseus calls for the mortal lovers to “conjoin” in “nightly revels and new jollity” (5.1.361), and Puck closes the play with “Take hands, all, and Robin will restore amends” (5.1.428). This mythopoetic theme echoes Hippolyta’s central vision speech and affirms her role as the reformer of the tragic force in the comic ending of the play. Puck the “liar” is replaced with an “honest puck” (5.1.422) in “Robin” (Goodfellow), as the risen Christ of spring renewal, who “restore[s] amends” (5.1.430).

When the Duke sees the lovers, he puzzles, “How shall we find the concord of this discord?” and “How *comes* this gentle concord in the world.” He even forgets himself, and relapses into an attitude of doubt and disbelief, but Hippolyta to helps him “remember” the harmonious tune of his new key. She follows his lead by repeating his words from the mountaintop where they marked, together, the musical confusion, and respond with all of nature in “one mutual cry.” Their unified response turns confusion to conjunction. Hippolyta echoes this hopeful resolution to unite all lovers in her five-line response to his disbelief, and simplifies the “strange and admirable” concept of the naturally “constant”, “mutual cry.”

When Demetrius confirms they were all together, and dreamed the same dream, reverses his conclusion that they had been dreaming to “Why then, we are awake” (4.1.197), and wants to collaborate: “Let’s recount our dreams” (4.1.198). In this way, Demetrius expresses his desire to translate their dreams into a true story. However, in these two Shakespeare’s plays, it is only the queens who describe their memories of Love and translate their vision into heroic action figures. As we will hear, St. John’s mystical experience, or vision, was also recounted as a dream, in Revelation.

Framing the biblical story, Blits notes that all of *Midsummer’s* artisans have Christian first names, utter Christian oaths (1.1.11; 3.1.12, 29; 4.1.202; 4.2.13-14), and do not mention Greek deities except in their archaic play. And, of course, many commentators suggest that Bottom’s vision is a dreamlike confusion, or “parody” as Blits terms it (*Soul* 156), of St. Paul’s vision of the heavenly life that God has prepared for his bride (1 Cor. 2:9). As the Bible can be read as a love story culminating in marriage between God and his Church triumphant, the earthly model reflects the same overlay of

the creative female and the male who protects and supports her central authoritative, or narrative power, process, or rule. Thus, Shakespeare might open Antony and Cleopatra's love story referring to "new heaven, new earth" in terms of re-envisioning their love-power in terms of the cosmic and the divine model.

An example from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which correlates to that mythopoetic view of rebalancing heaven and earth occurs when Titania specifies that the fairies "rehearse this song..." (5.1.389). She links the immortal spirits with the "rude mechanicals" (3.2.9) who rehearse their own tragic love story "near to her close and consecrated bower" (3.2.7). It is also notable that Titania's "fairy toys" of cosmic creation sing the mechanicals' tragic "antic fables" back to blessed sleep at midnight, or "fairy time" (5.1.356). And Oberon specifically demands that *the Queen* "call" for music, and speak the blessing, which can only mean that he does not possess the power. Thus, the lovers' parallel speech-acts correspond to the fairies' and move their endings from earthbound dissensions to heavenly communion, led by "spirits of another sort." This direction suggests that the final "story shall be changed", as they "rise above" or transcend apparent differences by imagining and recreating the ancient, organic whole through language. By extension, both temporal and heavenly worlds combine, in one house, in triumphant, interrelated pomp, all "intended for your delight" (5.1.118). The specialized workers come together, hand in hand, in the traditional Bergomasque dance, to participate in the nuptial solemnities, and thereby "join" the fairies in blessing the lovers. And thus, the "great clerks", mechanicals, or, "hard-handed men" (5.1.74-75), also tell their poetic version of the story of the night, where desire is wed to duty, and duty to desire—penitent prayer to holy communion.

As further confirmation of the female connection to the divine, it seems highly significant that none of the males can actually recount the story. Titania tries to articulate her perceptions, and Hippolyta, though confused, tries to bring the joy of the divine vision to earth.¹³¹ Hippolyta has night vision, which corresponds with Titania's fairy sight, and enables her to see the truth of the impossible in their communal experience of love: "transfigured so together." One ironic reason that her vision convinces is that she sounds confused about the message—the "strange and admirable" love story includes her own. Only Hippolyta's powerful character transports Theseus out of his ways to lift society from his anti-love laws. She has a unique connection to the outside world in the moon, and the green, or fairy world which allows her to see and interpret the earthly events at court with a clearer perspective. Like Pyramus's fatal misperception, the Duke misinterprets what he believes he sees through his narrow chink-vision until Hippolyta, as Love, provides a fresh view. Although Theseus tries to bluster about what "is" and "is not" real, as a father to a daughter, his vision of Hippolyta—as Love, or Venus—renders him powerless before her. Still more importantly, her calm, efficient statement sounds gently maternal, like a mother soothing or reassuring her immature, or insecure boy after a monstrous nightmare. Thus, Theseus is translated by love into something of "great[er] constancy" as he resolves to wed this force of nature "in another key" (1.1.19).

The simultaneous procession out of the darkness, into the light—with all classes of fairies, people, and creatures, "following" the spirit of love, together, to the marriage feast—evokes a strong image of the Biblical multitudes following Old Testament Noah,

¹³¹ Cleopatra's speech reverts to dreamy rhetoric when she recalls the moment of Love, in her first scene, after Antony's death, and again, in her own death, when she reenacts it, one last time on earth, and thereby makes the memory eternal.

to be physically saved from tragedy in the ark. The transfiguration at the end of *Midsummer* also recalls biblical imagery of the New Testament Christ after sudden visions of his new ending and Saul-to-Paul transformations of physical and phenomenological sight.

To return to the creative womb and tomb imagery of the barge and bower, as addressed in Chapter 3, Shakespeare's warrior queens figure *typoi*, or ark-types of the Old Testament ark of the covenant, transfiguring Noah as the old Adam, to new birth in Christ.¹³² Both Old and New Testament men figure generation and resurrection contained in types of ark, on top of and underneath the waves—the paradoxical womb and tomb metaphors of the natural cycle of the Great Mother, and Queen of Creation. In other words, Cleopatra's barge and Hippolyta's bower represent the prophetic mouth of the creator in the stories of exiled Eve, and Mother Mary. Mary absorbs Eve's disobedience as Noah and Jonah prefigure the birth, crucifixion, descent into Hades, transfiguration and resurrection of Christ. And so, mirroring that reflexive earth-to-heaven movement of the poet's eye, both sexes flow together, as receptive brides, to write the Revelation ending to the divine comedy.

So, the temporal womb of mystical creation seals death into the mortal, whereas the earthly tomb of death and disintegration promises rebirth to the immortal soul in the eternal wedding feast with the Christian bridegroom-hero. In her dream, as Titania, the Amazon Queen Hippolyta dies in her marriage bower, to reproduce herself as the Essential Female who cannot die. Similarly, in her monument, Shakespeare's Cleopatra

¹³² And in the floating "Noah", we must not fail to hear his name scrambled as, "Jonah", and relocated in the ark-monster of the deep who vomits the disobedient prophet out, like Eve, expelled from the bower of paradise. These double-gendered rebels prefigure the Christ, born of the new Eve's womb, and similarly disgorged from the tomb of Hades.

dies a mortal death but gives birth, in her barge, to her lover as her son—as the Mother of God does—and thus recycles into the literary aevum. In this way, the chaotic Old Testament ark, filled with beasts, “becomes” the ark of the covenant which is then absorbed into myth when Mary enters the holy of holies, and agrees to bear God and become the newly transfigured living Tabernacle. “For vilest things / Become themselves in her” might also be understood as meaning that the most beastly possibilities of mortal character will “become,” “come forth,” or, “happen” in her. This transformation supports the idea of women as allegorical witch-goddesses whom the patriarchs must suppress in containers to bolster the structural illusion of male superiority which legislates authority.

Titania’s experience in her “protected” bower can be read like an “injury” or rape, where her boundaries are violated, and she is forced to “Wake when some vile thing is near.” However, she describes how *she* will encircle Bottom, winding him in her arms like a black widow spider weaving a web in which to stun, rape, and then devour her male victim.¹³³ She wraps him in sweet honeysuckle, as if veiling a female bride, as she prepares to ravish him as a male. Her incantation describes the love ritual of Christian marriage: “For she his hairy temples then had rounded / With a coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers” (4.1.49-50). Like the ass’s bridal crown, the Queen seems to wind herself around Bottom’s male parts like the Serpent of the Nile wound her fingers around Antony’s parts, and thus controlled his actions: “So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle / Gently entwist; the female ivy so / enrings the barky fingers of the elm. / O how I love thee! How I dote on thee!” (4.1.41-44).¹³⁴ In her metaphorical sexual imagery,

¹³³ This metaphor is also used for Cleopatra: “She sits spiderlike, spinning a new web for Antony...” (Granville-Barker *Vol. 3* 12).

¹³⁴ Taylor does admit that there is a “jarring detail” which is out of place in his theory—that the female ivy is a parasitic plant that drains strength from whatever it entwines (Taylor *Ovid’s Myths* 60).

she “entwists,” “enrings,” and declares her love at the end of the scene, which can represent the delights of love as well as the devouring of the mate.¹³⁵

And so, “the story shall be changed” when Shakespeare’s depicts his warrior queens as the Essential Female. The effeminized Bottom, a mythical symbol of rampant sexual aggression, might also be read to fall asleep in Titania’s arms, having done her no harm.¹³⁶ This dream-view suggests that Hippolyta believes that Theseus will wed her in another key than injuries. In this reading, Cheryl Glenn suggests that “The female body becomes redemption itself” (78). This holy “sealing” aligns human sexuality with birth and death and weds the earthly with the divine in the Revelation. Figuring the Christian redemptive image and/or the Amazon encounter as a heroic journey, Carroll argues that, “for this play’s lovers to ready themselves for marriage, they must first pass through, and yield to, a deep, liminal dream stage in the process of metamorphosis wherein, the monstrous, or masculine, (sexuality, violence, and death) undergoes “comic detoxification” (163).

The cross-dressed warrior queens inhabit this space “in-between” conventions, and, in the revelation of the boy actor “boying” her “greatness,” the convention of gender definition is open to play. Belsey explains that cross-dressing offers an opportunity, “to speak from a position which is not that of a full, unified, gendered subject” (Belsey

¹³⁵ Note that Snug’s Lion character mistakes his line “devouring” for “deflowering” which also encourages the hearers to think on the battle between the sexes as a potentially merry and bloody war. This image adds to the bestial violence with overt sexual implications. Deflowering and then devouring a virgin was an annual ritual in Thebes, where the minotaur terrorized the city inside the labyrinth. Theseus rid the city of the menace. And, Paul Stapfer develops the theme of the paralyzing, devouring female Serpent of Old Nile, and Titania who “entwists” to kill by degrees (394).

¹³⁶ Shakespeare inverts Ovid’s *Golden Ass of Apuleius*, which contains graphic imagery of a rough ass making love to a young girl.

Disrupting 180), and Rackin specifies that that event, “gives us a glimpse of that liminal moment” (*Androgyny* 38). Thus, the Amazons disrupt patriarchal myths.

Divine Speech Acts

Bryant suggests that “Hippolyta is a poet, like God”, and that poet is in contact with the divine Word “by analogy in an action which is Christian, divine, and eternal” (7). He admits that “the human poet cannot make something out of nothing, as Christ did; but his making is a species of creation, nevertheless. One might call it an act in continuation of that impulse by which the world was made...In short, the poet is not God, but he does God’s work in God’s ways.” (Bryant 4) As the Christian view reads that God called the universe into being with the first word, the Logos, or Love, Bryant refers to language as “God’s ways” or “methods” of creation: specifically, language transforming strange and admirable data into something of great constancy, or the speech-act of poetry. Such work is important to my argument because it considers the apprehension of this transcendent reality in the action of language, and explains how poets bring the divine joy to earth, as the mythopoetic creator, and Mother of God delivers the Logos.

Through another analogous lens of this theme of mortal apprehension of the divine, the four evangelists told slightly different, often strangely contradictory versions of the same simultaneously “admirable” and, “terrible” story of tragical mirth—Love’s voluntary sacrifice. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were “transfigured so together” by the same force of nature, and through writing brought what they saw “from heaven to earth, and earth to heaven” into the great book of remembrance (Mal. 3:16; Dan. 7:10; Rev. 20:12, 15). Their common story’s fantastical imagery, such as the birth of God as a man, and the transfiguring vision of Christ’s passion seems implausible to the rational

mind. Yet, the fact that four different sorts of individual “mechanicals”, or “great clerks” saw it, recognized its power, and wrote it down to tell others, serves in some way to reconcile its discrepancies. As Garber and Adelman have explained, the Christian community recognizes this speech-act as an act of “faith” from visions of grace. Shakespeare’s women produce a similar effect in their speeches which reconcile opposites in marriage. In fact, these imaginative conjunctions of the known with “airy nothings” “*more witnesseth* than fancy’s images.”

Shakespeare’s four lovers function similarly to the four evangelists as they apprehend visions of Love and retell four versions of the same story of their night in the woods. The four different social groups of lovers—the fairies, the royals, the Athenians, and the mechanicals—perform the same function. Like the cosmic mythographers, artists, playwrights, and the Christian prophets, poets, and priests, their love stories all depict the threat of tragic tearing war between opposites, but reconcile and reunite in eternal love. And so, the lovers’ dream-visions of the eternal moment of creation demonstrate that Love and Death reduce all of creation to the lowest “base elements” of sexuality, as reflections of the highest cosmic divine force of Nature, or God. A Christian reading of this fact includes a sense of green world forgetfulness each love story’s particulars which “never did run smooth”, and focus instead on the abundant mercy of the God who invites all lovers to wed Him in the mystical marriage.

The paradoxical power struggle naturally continues among the unenlightened, warring factions in the battle between the sexes until there is a “lightning” revelation that they are injuring themselves, and each other, and their creator, and turn melancholy to funerals, forsake the hunt, and find another key to enjoy creative lovemaking in peace

and repentance. This is how Christians confess their faith in the Word of Love, despite unruly passions that threaten to destroy friendship in dark, violent, and monstrous lusts. The “newly illumined” draw near to the Poet of Heaven and receive Him into their bodies, along with their lovers, as a live coal to purge the darkness, in Holy Communion. In this way, Hippolyta might have received a divine revelation of her Lord Theseus as a “typos” or archetypal vision of Theos, or even Zeus, and thereby found the grace to obey him in an offering of gratitude. Thus, does Hippolyta “in conclusion dumbly [break] off, / Not paying [Theseus] a welcome” but instead paying a welcome to Theos. Blinded like St. Paul, in the antic fable, Hippolyta forsakes the hunting of men, as a follower of her strong imagination’s apprehensions of Christ’s transfiguring example. The great Amazon warrior queen lowers her deadly bow, wounded by “another” arrow of Love, as a witness to the New Testament of peace.

From this perspective, there is no judgment of Theseus’s blind ignorant arrogance, as Hippolyta “sees” far beyond his range, and realigns her will with the universal Father’s, and “translates” them both by faith in the true “bringer of joy.” She revises her sense of duty and resituates her natural female power from the military to the maternal as the image of the divinely favored, “Theotokos,” or “god-bearer” as the Queen of Heaven. Thus, she recalls the memory of the eternal Earth-Mother, and all of the literary iterations of that original life-force and reincarnates herself in the Female.

Taylor notes that, after Oberon “exploits her sensual nature in delirium, to cure her disobedience, Titania resumes her proper marital role, and obeys her husband without question” (*Ovid’s Myths* 60). After this event, Titania only speaks after Oberon, whom she addresses as, “My Oberon” (4.1.75) and, “my lord” (4.1.98). It seems ironic that she

acts naturally sensual during her “delirium,” and then, “released,” she is mechanically obedient to Oberon’s imperative commands, such as “Silence a while” (4.1.79), “Titania, music call” (4.1.80), “Strike more dead” (4.1.80), and “Come, my queen, / Take hands with me,” and “Rock the ground...” It is as though the drugged delirium occurs *after* he removes the flower’s magic from her eyes. Then, she seems forced to obey Oberon, like one of Theseus’s “great clerks,” and hold, or enring, his barky finger, but without the gushing poetry we hear from her toward Bottom. Titania seems to understand that the world depends on her to comply and take her place in the natural balance. And so, in another Shakespearean wink, “the inconstant, meddling fairies “emerge as a model Elizabethan patriarchal marriage” (Taylor *Ovid’s Myths* 60).

Hippolyta performs a similar speech-obedience following Theseus’s mysterious change of heart. He boasts of his hunting hounds’ glorious “musical confusion” to impress his fiancée while hunting in the woods. Hippolyta might continue to belittle him with superior stories of Hercules and Cadmus’ better hounds, reading sexual prowess, into “sweet thunder” when they discover the lovers on the ground. This is exactly the time and place where Titania and Oberon “take hands” and renew in amity” although no one except enchanted Bottom (and the audience) can see the fairies.¹³⁷ In fact, if we believe Titania’s story about inhabiting mortals to entice Theseus to desire and impregnate her, we might also imagine that the force of Love inhabits Hippolyta, and thereby “speaks” through her to take hands with Theseus in amity. Puck enchants Bottom

¹³⁷ In the forest moonlight dream, the lovers transform into figurative sexual animals, and Hippolyta and Theseus are released from the restraining forces of civilized society in the forms of the fairy royals. Even the mechanicals double with the fairies, which “completes the dream, the surrealism of the mortal world becoming the immortal world. The forest confronts each character with their most secret desire. And the flower juice, is not a magical potion, but a force of super-nature, as simply symbolic as Cupid’s arrow. It brings out what is in our hearts” (Bate *Intro* 135). Adelman reminds us that “in Shakespeare’s romances, the dream is usually revealed as the reality” (*Liar* 166).

just beyond the hawthorn brake where the mechanicals rehearse, and Titania hears his “singing” from her bower. When Titania wakes, she sees the lovers on the ground, around her. These confusions occur at the same time, in the same place in the woods.

To further connect the heavenly and earthly lovers, Oberon’s language recalls Theseus’ first speech when he calls for a “triumphant” wedding dance, “all in jollity” and “prosperity” (4.1.88-91) while Theseus calls for his hunting hounds to bark in musical confusion. To emphasize this simultaneity, a director might split the stage, and run both stories, side by side, at once, with the actors alternating lines to demonstrate the juxtaposition, and strategically blocking the parallel plot lines to show all participants confused, at the same time, and then running to converge on the palace wedding scene together. The men might toss the ass’s head between them, crossing the liminal world boundaries, in space and time, as love directs, ending up on Pyramus’s head, as he misspeaks his hopeless, Old Testament lines.

In Hippolyta’s silence, Theseus finally hears reason, or comprehends that the way to make his wedding day truly festive is to lift the law of discord and find harmony with the feminine voice of will. Thus, the “vile” Duke “becomes” the humble image of one of Love’s supplicants, or, “great clerks.” The Queen reasons that it was not just one lover carried away by imagined confusion, but that all four have experienced the same story, in harmony and transfiguration, together, along with the fairy forces they cannot see but only feel or imagine. Taylor suggests that Theseus’ peace “tacitly acknowledges the shortcomings of his value-system” (*Ovid’s Myths* 61), especially in his admission that others see things in heaven and earth “more than cool reason ever comprehends” (5.1.6). McGuire contends that Theseus appears “translated” and enchanted when he abruptly

changes his ruling to invite Hermia to wed Lysander (14). In the first scene, Theseus condemns Hermia, and then orders *his* queen, as *his* servant: “Come, *my* Hippolyta...” Then, perhaps noticing her silent response, he falters, “What cheer, my love?” But, importantly, after he “extenuates” his law and similarly declares “our purposed hunting shall be set aside” (4.1.182), he sounds like he has truly changed keys, especially when he omits the possessive pronoun “my” in: “Come, Hippolyta” (4.1.185) as they leave for the wedding festivities. Or, in a simpler wink, Shakespeare may be reiterating Theseus’s masculine focus to dominate, and disempower his wild captive, sexually and socially, to complete his military defeat.

On the opposite hand, regardless of the Duke’s motives, Hippolyta opens Act 5 by addressing her rival as “my Theseus” (5.1.1829), as though she might approve of him as “*my* choice.” The possessive pronoun can also be understood as an endearment. At the same time, it is important to note that Hippolyta does not defer to Theseus as “my lord”, like every other character does. It seems that “my Theseus” might also indicate that *she* owns *him*, rather than “my lord” which implies the opposite. Soon after the opening of Act 5, Hippolyta chants: “But all the story of the night told over, / And all their minds transfigured so together...” like a hypnotic spell after Theseus insists: “I never may believe these antique fables, nor these fairy toys” (5.1.1833). After her five-line rebuttal, Theseus seems to give in, completely, to mirth and generous good will toward everyone, as if bewitched by love. Like Cleopatra, Hippolyta could easily be interpreted as a rational, if cold-hearted, opportunistic female, but few scholars bother to explore complications like that with her character. She is depicted as either savage, as in Janet

Adelman's metaphorical depiction of her as armed Venus, or compliant, as Brooks and Gibson interpret her character as a willing bride.

Harold Brooks represents most male critics who claim that they know what Hippolyta is thinking: "Theseus is an ardent lover, and in her reply, Hippolyta reciprocates his love" (*Intro* lxxxix). Even Gibson, who importantly offers that Hippolyta defeats Theseus in battle, later uses her as an example of wifely humility (*A Woman's Woorth* 37). Marshall identifies a "complacent, acquiescent, and above all silent, Hippolyta, which confirms that she has received what she desires" (Marshall 548). However, that Hippolyta herself never speaks of desire highlights McGuire's argument that her silence requires interpretive action, and that that critical choice shapes a wider perspective on the play's relationships and structures. Schwarz describes the queen's voice as mysteriously "liminal" (206). This reading demonstrates that the Amazons function as both real rulers *and* divine, mythic legends.

In fact, in an example of Shakespeare's genius for puzzles, Blits does not seem to notice that, in his reading of Act 4, he must counter his own Act I argument on this topic. He presents evidence for Hippolyta's Amazon warrior heart *rather than* her role as a smitten lover. He notes that "Hippolyta never speaks with such passion, nor at such length as when recounting the time she bayed the boar with Hercules and Cadmus in Crete, and will later say that the music that most fills her heart is the "cry"—the "sweet thunder"—of the Spartan hounds on that hunt" (Blits *Soul* 21). Blits claims that she hears the chaotic "key" of war, not the music of wedding revels. Paradoxically, if Theseus has won her love in that violence, as Kott argues, then Hippolyta might not welcome his new idea of tame love. Blits concedes that "hunting and war might still be his 'warrior

love[‘s]’ (II. i. 71) deepest passion” (*Soul* 21). However, I do not believe that Shakespeare requires hearers to make a choice between alternatives, but rather to try and focus both conflicting views together, at one time.

A rare and unpopular reading of Hippolyta suggests that the great queen might suddenly shape-shift, as though doffing a costumed role. She might tire of playing the powerful Amazon, as if that was all an act or a drugged dream—an inversion of Titania’s willfulness. She acts as if the way she is wont to be is as Oberon dictates for Titania. In this vignette, she quits this game and wishes the moon would change so she could slip into her nightgown and go to bed like the rest of the audience. Although critics seem to neglect this observation, it is possible to interpret this as Love suddenly transfiguring the chaos of Hippolyta’s defensive battle against men, marriage, and family. The holy and wanton wind of the spirit of love seems to swell into Hippolyta’s speech-acts, like Cleopatra’s barge sails, and her votaress’s belly, and “grow” into “constant” love.

Blits asserts that between the morning hunt (4.1.111-117) and her wedding celebration, “Hippolyta seems to have passed from Amazon to Athenian—if lawful marriage is not a cause of her becoming civilized, it is a sign of it” (Blits *Soul* 164). And Barker agrees that “she seems to shed the last traces of Amazon and to turn Athenian—or Elizabethan—a fine lady, top to toe” (*Vol 6* 124). Nevo asserts that by the time Egeus returns to demand death for his daughter, “Hippolyta is no longer playing the role of the man-woman Amazon” (Nevo 62). She extracts the androkton “warrior” persona in the mountaintop scene, and embraces the powerful feminine in her human nature.

Nemerov admits: “I have put the accent all on Hippolyta’s part, but Shakespeare himself not only sanctions but celebrates this marriage” (640). I have added the

figurative element of the heavenly wedding to that worldly marriage, to suggest that it also demonstrates the mythopoetic theme of discordia concors, or the wedding of complementary opposites. Nemerov specifically notes the irony that Theseus' views seem aligned with the mysterious and fable-minded Plato, while in Hippolyta's "great constancy" we hear some echo of the plain-spoken other side" (Nemerov 641). In this reading, Hippolyta functions as a succinct voice of reason, however inconclusive her conclusion might sound. Conversely, Theseus's dismissal of the overactive imagination comes directly from his poetic imagination when he visualizes lovers, madmen, and poets using detailed metaphors.

Hippolyta sounds even-handed in her reasoning that the story's coherence overrules imagination, or "fancy's images." She explains that the witness of parallel stories overrides fanciful or fabricated confusion; however, she simply states "Tis strange," like a judge or authority. And, from the other side of that argument, the seasoned warrior would not exhibit imbalances, whereas Theseus' long-winded denunciation seems to reveal anxiety and a need to convince others of what *he* believes to be reason, as he had in his "old" patriarchal key in the courtroom in Athens. Here, Shakespeare inverts conventional gendered stereotypes to show the Queen as the better judge of reason and to find concord in this discord.

When he dismisses the lovers' reports, as "fairy toys" or "airy nothings" (5.1.2-3), Theseus, the male authority, *comprehends* the lovers' mysterious report as "more strange than true" in a dismissive declaration of "airy *nothing*." While Hippolyta agrees that the story is "strange and admirable", she also apprehends "*something* of great constancy" beyond the reach of reason. Whereas Theseus comprehends nothing, Hippolyta perceives

something more true than strange. She witnesses a figurative moment of lightning brightness that illuminates heaven and earth at the same time, in her perception. As Shakespeare tells us that love sees not with the eyes but with the mind, we can logically deduce that Love is providing her mind's eye with these insights. Hippolyta is willing to embrace the space between her understanding and that elusive, paradoxically protean, same old story of "something" which never changes and absorbs the disintegration of death into eternal life. Hippolyta's connection to Titania, the moon, Venus, Gaia, and the Essential Female demonstrates a "magisterial overview" which "shows us the affinities of the wood-world with that part of the mind below reason yet connected with imagination" (Bloom *Interpretations* vii).

In the liminal doorway between heaven and earth, the fairy stands on the threshold between spirit and human, benevolent and beastly, masculine and feminine, commoner and royalty, actors and audience. Reiterating Hippolyta's story of the night, Puck does not invoke or entreat the spirits of heaven, or hell, but addresses all listeners to hear a bedtime story. His ever-present broom,¹³⁸ suggests that domesticating the wolfish masculine impulse in marriage sweeps the dust of death (Gen. 3:19) "behind the door" (5.1.382). And the married couples figure Christ's reconciling of opposites in the resurrection image of "graves all gaping wide" (5.1.372; Dan.12:2; Isa. 26:19; 1 Cor. 15:52; Matt. 27:52).

Further, Shakespeare's wolf "beholds the moon" rather than howling. Biblical language uses "Behold" to announce a vision of the divine, and thus, the beast's uncharacteristic passivity denotes a change of attention from earthly devouring to

heavenly contemplation of the Essential Female. The icon of vicious masculinity appears transfixed by the moon's magnificence, as Theseus's first lines of moon imagery suggests, in reference to Hippolyta. The transfigured wolf might also represent Hippolyta's vision of her hero on the moonlit mountain, when Theseus calls off the hunt to "behold" his bride, similarly disarmed, and unveiled as the new moon. Either way, this figure commands the audience's attention after the roaring, devouring lion and gaping graves imagery, and it represents the moment when time stops and art forms. Thus, the broom represents the traditionally female domestic tool of the mother, at the end of her workday, mythopoetically linking her daily service directly to eternal salvation. She sweeps away the tragic, and "shall renew the face of the earth" (Ps. 140:30).

Regarding the theme of comedy usurping tragedy, in the line—"Things base and vile, holding no quantity, / Love can transpose to form and dignity"¹³⁹ (1.1.232-233), Hippolyta's simple speech echoes the Old Testament prophecy (Hos. 13:14) which is fulfilled in the New, that "Death has no sting, or victory" (1 Cor. 15:55). Here, Hippolyta's decision importantly parallels Cleopatra's immutable resolution to marry death, and thereby abolish it. And in the Serpent of the Nile's choice of "easy ways to die," Cleopatra might recall their shared Amazon mascot of the eternal serpent, or uroboros. Plutarch wrote: "The Aspis doth never age or wax old" and, "it moveth in all facility, readiness, and celerity" (Plutarch *The Morals* 1316). In the image of the holy family, the aging Amazon warrior queen might prefigure Cleopatra as the immortal serpent who is "wrinkled deep in time," although "age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety."

¹³⁹ This parallels Cleopatra's ability to "purge mortal grossness, "make defect perfection, since the "vilest things Become themselves in her."

Temple rites might only serve as a public sanction for the Duke's private pleasures, as he only mentions that ceremony once in passing, to move to the main event. The textual evidence points directly to Theseus's obsessive worship of his own personal power in the form of sexual conquest of the Amazon army, and ravishing the body of its commander. The Duke confesses to being "over-full of self-affairs" (1.1.113). Despite his city's name, he never mentions the virgin Athena, but often refers to Venus and Cupid. (1.1.169, 171, 235; 2.1.157, 161, 165; 3.1.61, 102, 107, 440; 4.1.72). Blits mentions that these two love deities "correspond directly to an experience of the human soul," which contextualizes that salvific event as a combined expression of duty and desire, art and wisdom, passionate life and rational thought (Blits *Soul* 10). However, even Venus and Cupid disappear from human speech after Theseus overbears the ancient law, except in the artisan's ancient fictional narrative, or in profane oaths (5.1.48, 52, 176, 273-74, 307-8, 323-28).

In other words, Theseus updates the old love story to feature himself as the epic hero who eclipses all previous models, including Christ, as savior of heaven and earth. This powerful position ironically suggests the impatient desire of the lover, the destructive, delusional fear of the lunatic, and the creative interpretation and synthesis of the poet. But, on closer examination, it is Hippolyta's poetry that inspires and authors this critical speech-act to idealize the brutal rapist as a lawful husband—from barbaric to civilized—despite contradictions. According to Blits, this essential poetry constitutes the highly artistic soul of "Thesean Athens" (*Soul* 10).

In their high diction and rhetorical style, Shakespeare's Amazon warrior queens perform as that dynamic action-figure—the Poet. In their *dramatis personae*, they speak

out as the ambivalent androgynous cosmic force of “the glory of the Father” (as Cleopatra’s name connotes), and the eternal Mother Nature. In this role, these women conjugate themselves in the theatre’s present perfect tense, as “I speak”, “I write”, and “I create”: transfiguring reality for themselves and their people, into *kairos*, as well as *chronos*. This dramatic device asserts the eternal moment by condensing time and space in the heroic story.

Blits suggests that Theseus’s “ungracious conduct brings out what is hidden in the noble kindness” (*Soul* 176). In other words, his display of democratic politics reveals his “disguised contempt” (5.1.341-48).¹⁴⁰ For instance, Theseus reveals his thinly-veiled contempt for imaginative people like poets when he talks about the foolish actors’ vain opinion of themselves as “excellent men” (5.1.212). However, after the play, he resumes his position as Duke, and conceals his criticism in warm lies: “...and so it is, truly, and very notably discharged” (5.1.347). Similarly, in Act 5, Hippolyta is impatient with the mechanicals’ efforts: “This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard” (5.1.210), and Theseus retracts his previous dismissal of the imagination: “The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them” (5.1.211-12). Here, he champions imagination.

Considering this revised context, it is necessary to re-interpret Hippolyta’s five-line response: “and all their minds transfigured so together, more witnesseth than fancy’s images.”¹⁴¹ In other words, “If we all see and collectively believe or, at least, “suspend disbelief”, as the complementary opposite, we can dispel individual dissonance. We can

¹⁴⁰ This exactly parallels Cleopatra’s cruel mockery when she asks Mardian to entertain her, and he offers his best efforts with “fierce affections,” as he assures her.

¹⁴¹ Marjorie Garber (1974) asserts that “Dreams, truer than the reality they seek to interpret and transform, take priority over reason” (Garber “Spirits” 87).

strike a new “key”, a harmonious chord, or “mutual” and “tuneable cry” in collective agreement on a common experience or story. Also, the word “witnesseth” means “to be privy to” or “see,” but also to sign a rule of law, legitimized by an authority, rather than conjured by lunatics, madmen, or poets. Nevo notes that: “Hippolyta’s organic metaphor is interesting: cognition, it says, or re-cognition, grows in the mind in the process of recounting, re-telling” (71). Further, “These fantastic follies, reduced, or expanded to absurdity, will prove homeopathically therapeutic, if imagination amend them by making them intelligible” (Nevo 71). Hippolyta reasons with her suddenly imaginative husband, “It must be your imagination then, not theirs” (5.1.213). Therefore, it is up to the audience to interpret and amend the apparent discord of erotic violence with creative conjunction. Above all, the vision depends on the imaginative powers of every individual who shares the human mystery.

Chapter 7

Immortal Longings: 'Til Death Do Us Part

As she dies, the emotional force of Cleopatra's memorable declaration, "Husband, I come" moves the audience to translate the impossible into the plausible. The ongoing, simple present tense keeps the eternal moment ever-present. J. Hall observes that Cleopatra's "dramatic poetry stills the flux, or holds in check the relentless eddyings of the action" (144).¹⁴² It seals the literal and figurative phallus at the apex of its beauty and power, immortalizing natural life in art. Barton notes that "It is Cleopatra who finally arrests the eddying of the vagabond flag in an artful death, "no longer the moon's votaress but 'marble constant'" (*Divided* 135). Conversely, J. Hall insists that "despite its iconic perfection in repose, Cleopatra's death remains kinetic, a ritual of regal splendor that subsumes but does not utterly vanquish the individual woman whom 'every thing becomes'" (145).¹⁴³ In this reading, Cleopatra seems to exist in the eternal "here and now" moment of infinitely creative lovemaking.

As Antony diminishes, Cleopatra's dream enlarges his memory "within the realm of nature, not of fancy," as Adelman observes, because, "To the extent that we are engaged with the protagonist, his judgment will be our judgment; and to that extent it will become dramatic fact." (*Liar* 158) Throughout the final scene, Cleopatra engages the audience through her mythopoetics. The audience might believe the impossible because

¹⁴² Like Romantic Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn" immortalizes natural life in art.

¹⁴³ See also Zimbardo for further developments in "permanence in mutability" (36).

of her poetry. To this end, Shakespeare structures the play to slow to a standstill, at the end, so the audience can focus, for the first time, on Cleopatra's words. The first three acts include frantic motion, reports of rollicking sex, flirtatious fishing, hopping, gaudy nights, and confusing contradictions and opinions around the lovers' characters and reputations, particularly defamation of Cleopatra's. Conversely, in the final act, the representative of the ancient original warrior queen stands alone, as in the cosmic and the earthly Amazon encounter. She removes her helmet and translates the violent dynamics to creative eros. In the Christian, and/or Romantic version of the Amazon encounter, Shakespeare's female warrior constantly challenges and defeats the Herculean hero in battle, and then reveals a secret dream of him as a godlike lover. She then sacrifices herself in immortal longings for more of his love which translates them both into eternal life as a family.

Hughes asserts that in, "immortal longings," *Antony* demonstrates "the tragedy of Eros, the God of Life itself in the mortal body" (320). However, like the suffering Christ, "though they carve up the living body, they cannot touch the divine nature, but only liberate it", [. . .] "the absolute survival of the Female tracks Shakespeare's hidden direction revealed in the transcendental deaths of Antony and Cleopatra" (Hughes 320, 325). Thus, the Great Mother and Queen of Hell, embodied in the Serpent of the Nile, liberates the divine Female in Antony, and unites them both in eternal unity. Similarly, Starks summarizes that Shakespeare's play "explores the intrinsic link between sexuality and death in the erotic imagination of Western myth, poetry and painting, and culminates in this poetic fusion of death and sexuality" (*Immortal* 243-244). Starks' argument suggests that, like Hippolyta's "injury" and Theseus's love-wound, the most prevalent

images of Petrarchan poetry—the dismembered or penetrated body, bleeding wounds, phallic weapons, and instruments of torture—carry through from Classical myth and Christian martyrdom.¹⁴⁴ Arrows and wounded hearts, as well as the oxymoronic pleasure and pain of orgasmic “death” in both plays evoke images of the fusion of love and violence in the erotic imagination and recall the penetrated body of Christ.

Starks describes Antony’s death as “a sacrifice to his goddess”, in a scene that “exploits the thrill of sexual transgression, the desire of submission, and the transcendence of death’s embrace—at once dangerous, beautiful, and irrepressibly erotic” (*Immortal* 243). Frye concurs: “Antony can only fall into the mythical world of passion opposite it, where the dominating figure is female, and the hero is her subordinate. He goes to a hero’s destruction, yet even in his death he is upstaged by Cleopatra, who monopolizes the attention of the audience to the end” (*Fools* 74). So, “her Egypt” is a metaphor for the attraction she holds, which has all to do with the words she speaks. She directs his play-action. She negotiates her final story using Antony’s body as collateral.¹⁴⁵

Just as Hercules abandons Antony, Cleopatra casts off Isis in moon references, such as “now the fleeting moon / No planet is of mine” (5.2.239-240), and replaces that symbol in her personal cosmos with Venus: “O eastern star!” Waddington considers these two changes as “casting off the false and the assumption of the true mythic identity”

¹⁴⁴ Shakespeare gives Cleopatra authoritative power in her sexuality when she innovates the pleasure/pain of the Petrarchan wound to revise the origin of black skin, “from coupling with a classical deity,” such as Mars, or Hercules (Deats 25). Barroll explains that Cleopatra’s ideal of Antony is that “to be loved by gods or kings is much the same thing” (Barroll *Dreaming* 139). She elevates him to an ultimate and supreme stasis, not an action. The images—“O heavenly mingle! Be’st thou sad or merry, / The violence of either thee becomes, / So does it no man else” (1.5.19-21)—recall Shakespeare’s imagery of his own poet in *Midsummer* whose descriptions locate and name the heavenly in the earthly.

¹⁴⁵ For more on this theme of Cleopatra’s “uncommon power” from an aggressive feminist perspective, see Charnes *Notorious* 152, and Gohlke for more on the theme of Cleopatra and Caesar as two poles between which Antony is passed.

(Waddington 216). Cleopatra tells the old story in a new way, now, in which the players become higher than the gods. Shakespeare has Antony and Theseus replace Hercules, Cleopatra replace Isis, and Hippolyta/Titania replace Venus, in the image of the Essential Female.¹⁴⁶ In the queen's ecstatic, "O, Antony!" Cleopatra's suicide unites images of life, sexuality, and death, as she performs her death as an act of passionate love and erotic release—in her speech-act of transfiguration into the immortal goddess.

If Antony, as a bridegroom, longs to run into Eros' sword as to a lover's bed (4.15.100-101), then, in a similar image with the serpent at her breast, Starks suggests, "Cleopatra becomes Isis as both Eve and Mary, the degenerative/ regenerative duality of the Egyptian goddess" (*Immortal* 252-253). Thus, Starks contends that Shakespeare's staged tableau of the goddess/Virgin Cleopatra holding the whipped, pierced, and bleeding body of Antony/Christ in her arms "resonates as a powerfully erotic pietà" (*Immortal* 253).¹⁴⁷ In this way, the queen's words, "Husband, I come" locate and name her into the married status she desires in life. Her royal-sounding high rhetoric mythopoetically links earthy sex and eternal communion. She legitimizes herself as Antony's "entitled" wife, and thereby ennobles the word "death" as the play progresses.

Fawcner notes that "Shakespeare perfects this bold conception only by removing from death, all that, in death, suggests its force as rupture and discontinuity" (166).

Antony accomplishes this "erotization of death" and negation of pain through Cleopatra's

¹⁴⁶ In "The Uses of Poetry", Eliot explains the process: "It is ultimately the function of art in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality and thereby eliciting some perception of an order of reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation; and they leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no further" (*Selected* 79). Beatrice led Dante to the Empyrean of heavenly love, and thereby saved his soul.

¹⁴⁷ When Enobarbus leaves Antony, after Cleopatra had already left the battle, he likens Antony to a stabbed man, or a pitiful, dying fish which has been hooked many times: "Sir, sir, thou art so leaky/ That we must leave thee to thy sinking, for / Thy dearest quit thee." (III. xiii. 63-65)

“soothing, fluid, and self-extending” words (166). As a noble female warrior, she receives death into her body as both her conqueror’s sword and a welcome lover. Antony, on the other hand, expresses the same thought in male terms: “The next time I do fight, I’ll make death love me” (3.13.192-193). However, it is Cleopatra who perfects Antony’s elevation and erection. Fawcner insists that “In this identification, Shakespeare is obviously mobilizing a sexual nexus that the Renaissance had animated by refashioning the classical story of the unlawful union of Mars and Venus. Cleopatra disarms death through the very process that Renaissance artists captured as the influence of Venus over Mars” (166). Cleopatra’s own words, “I am marble constant” seem to stabilize and settle her outrageous shifts inside the larger story.

In her final act of poetry, Cleopatra toys with, and embraces death as a new lover. However, Shakespeare continues to suspend the expected, tragic, and melodramatic in the great queen’s mundane small talk, playful sensuality, elaborate costuming, and political strategizing, as if she were anticipating her final rendezvous with death as another night of love. She weighs her options until the last minute. She has been scripting, editing, directing, negotiating, rehearsing, delaying, denying, and staging this scene during the previous acts, to consider how she might be remembered. The audience is aware of Cleopatra’s anxiety throughout the play, and she narrates, directs, and stars in the high solemnity of robing, bejeweling, and crowning herself to dramatically maximize her mythic height (5.2.279-280). The closing scenes are full of theatrical terms, and “The fifth act is concerned almost exclusively with the representational politics of Cleopatra’s defeat, or how Caesar will stage her as a performance in Rome” (Charnes *Notorious* 131).

This last “battle of wits” between Caesar and Cleopatra, is “essentially a struggle over who will stage the queen’s final show” (Rose 12).

In the fifth and final act, Shakespeare plays his final card when Cleopatra trumps Caesar. Octavius relates what her living persona means to him: “...For her *life* in Rome / Would be eternal in our triumph” (5.1.62-63). Caesar knew that Cleopatra possessed the “greatness” to “defeat us” or “me”, in the sense of the royal “we.” Here, “our” also means, “my” and “us” means “me” since the name of Caesar is synonymous with Rome, as Egypt is synonymous with Cleopatra. Cleopatra easily matches wits with Caesar, as “she recognizes this behavior as an aspect of her own comportment vis-à-vis Antony, finds such gaming utterly transparent” (Fawkner 152). Cleopatra realizes that if she can perform a “great” act of imagination, she will exalt her own mythological identity as the goddess Venus—in fact, her triumph will empty Caesar’s military procession of pomp, and eternally “fix” attention on the magnificent crown of Egypt.

Cleopatra first toys with Caesar by returning polite flattery then talks about business matters, and stalls for time: “See, Caesar! O behold, / How *pomp* is follow’d! Mine will now be yours, / And *should we shift estates, yours would be mine*” (5.2.49-51). Notably, she follows his lead, and speaks of “mine” and “yours,” but never “ours.” The subtle reader hears “mine” and “yours” as both earthly kingdoms, treasure-houses, and lands, and also eternal glory in memory of greatness. This might show that Cleopatra still vies for her chance to rule “his” world. However, in the next few lines, she will charm Caesar’s confidante, and thus learn the way to shift temporal estates, or “states”, and leave him with nothing but an empty with an empty gameboard world, and no opponents

to play with or against. In this way, “yours will be mine”, and he will follow *her* pomp, led in triumph as the defeated and soon forgotten loser.

This is why, as Fawcner points out, the first Roman response to Cleopatra’s political victory in death is “Caesar beguil’d” (5.2.322). Thus, the queen checkmates the king in a last-minute move. And Caesar cannot help but admire her Eternal Female “cunning past man’s thought” in these “high events” that “Strike” him (5.2.358-59). In one last Shakespearean wink, or bend of imagination, we might hear the “lass unparalleled” laugh and hiss at the “sole sir” again, in, “Ass / unpolicied” (5.2.305-6), as Caesar (unwittingly) trusts his own (possible) traitor, Dolabella, to bury her in “High order” as the greatest prince o’ the world’s equal, in military “solemnity” beside “her Antony.” Her high art disassembles his structure.

The poetic vision of the whole world rising from matter to spirit after mingling, melting, and mating, also blends similar sexual imagery around death. This reading reflects Knight’s transcendental humanist perspective on the dramatization of the physical aspects of sex in earth and water, upon which spiritual love is built in fire and air. Shakespeare’s queens use the language of love to transcend and transfigure their circumstances into heavenly pictures of reality. The elements cohere, like the comic bawdry and the tragic as the play rises to transcend the earthly toward spiritual love. While Cleopatra becomes fire and air, she is nursing the worm, and there is still the trail of Nilus’ slime on the fig leaves (2.349-51).

As she makes love to Death, Cleopatra anticipates more sex with Antony. Not surprisingly, Nuttall points out the shadow of death in the fertility imagery: “we find within it a hint of the disgusting: creatures form like maggots in the slime of the fertile

[. . .] fecund Egypt itself is hyperbolic and paradoxical—it breeds both crops and serpents, indiscriminately, in its excessive flooding, and both are necessary for fertility. Death quite literally becomes the measure of life” (331). As Mother Nature, the Queen of Egypt is all an ever shifting riverscape with life and death bursting from her at all times. Early in the play, she reiterates Antony’s claim that their love will need a new container, in poetry which depicts sexual life, as well as bodily death. She wails: “...I / shall fall: / It cannot be thus long, the sides of nature / Will not sustain it” (1.3.15-17) when he leaves her for Rome, and thus foreshadows her end when he dies.

In her performance at Cydnus, Cleopatra re-enacts the earth goddess of pleasure and fertility, and Enobarbus’s review raves about her own infinite sexual appeal: “she makes hungry, / Where most she satisfies.” She herself reports on her effect on Antony, in terms of “bounty”, as with Julius Caesar, in “ploughing” and “cropping”, and Gnaeus Pompey’s brow grew in her until he “died looking upon his life”, as Antony also does. Natural life, like Cleopatra’s words for Antony’s bounty, “grows the more by reaping.” From this perspective, Antony and Cleopatra must die to live on in their ever-expanding world of passion. From the first scene, Cleopatra has been asking Antony how much he will give up for love of her, as Christ, the divine bridegroom, did for humanity, and His bride is expected to do for Him, to enter the bridal chamber. Cleopatra tells Antony: “Die where thou hast liv’d, / Quicken with kissing...” (4.15.38-39). She tries to send him off to death with kissing, where he has liv’d his heaven on earth. Thus, she “purges [his] mortal grossness” as Titania promises Bottom, and “makes defect perfection.”

Adelman suggests that: “Throughout this play, we are in the presence of the most Christian of paradoxes: that man must lose himself in order to gain himself” (*Liar* 156)

(Mark 8:36 KJV). “In the scuffles of great fights hath burst / The buckles on his breast” (I. i. 6-7), and he entreats his heart to “crack thy frail case” of “that huge spirit” (4.15. 89). Antony is freed by Cleopatra’s sexual “stirrings.” In this reading, the lovers who are focused on reuniting in eternity must both relinquish their baser elements and frail cases, both in creative sexuality and death, in order to translate to the infinite. Shakespeare is clear that Cleopatra’s imaginative poetry accomplishes that magic and connects them with their vision of the divine—endless, uninterrupted love.

When Antony says, “I will run to death as to a bridegroom’s bed,” (4. 14. 100-102), and, “I come my queen”, his erotic relief in this violence is palpable to the audience. His death points to the emergence of Christianity in his allusions to marrying the church as a bride. (Rev. 19:7; Matt. 9:15; 2Cor. 11:2; John 3:29; Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 21:9, 17). And Cleopatra’s poetry at Antony’s death scene prepares us for the leap of faith necessary in her similarly erotic and transcendent ending poetry. So, when Antony desires death, in this way, and Cleopatra expresses her “immortal longings”, there is an erotic aspect to the necessary physical violence required to enact that demonstration of love in death. They are immersed in each other’s bodies while sexually dying, but living in mortal bliss, and eternity is also immersed in their lips and eyes, during the sexual merging, before the physical immersion in the earth mother, in mortal death.

In *Antony*, Cleopatra represents the Mother Nile as the quasi-divine force of death and regeneration. In particular, she outlines the sexual rhythms of growth, overflow, and recession, with herself as the divine author and queen of desire. Then, she demonstrates that the only way to control for the constant mutability of nature is to immerse oneself in it and die. Adelman notes that: “The senses of spirit violently bursting through the case of

nature, or armor, is appropriate to the double nature of man as spirit incarnate: literally embodied; and it is also appropriate to human sexuality on the most literal and physiological level” (*Liar* 157). Antony describes his heart bursting forth from his armor in sexual impulse to “live” using the same image as he does when he is dying, and begs his heart to “Crack thy frail case!” (4.14.41). When death reverses the incarnation, and separates the soul from the body, Cleopatra finds a way to achieve her aims that resembles “a lover’s pinch”, and thus, translates herself from one form of bliss to another, articulating her own poetic form of immortalization in erotic violence. In this way, the paradoxical elements of eros, as love, and violence, as death, prove inseparable. Thus, in the Christian Romantic reading their love might symbolize the “undying” love of Christ.

Charney reminds us that “Life is the intrinsic knot, or essential thing” (18). The essential “knot of life” might be imagined both physically and metaphorically, in both the shape and function of the male genitalia, as full of the fluid of life. Also, the similarly shaped asp contains the milk of death, as the lover who will “untie” Cleopatra, as Antony’s symbolic warrior’s sword would “undo,” “free,” or “kill” her, and Theseus’s sword will “win” Hippolyta by “doing” her injuries. Charney points out that Shakespeare gives Cleopatra both formal and playful words to emphasize these paradoxical images: the Latinate “intrinsicate” heightens the diction, whereas “poor venomous fool” and “mortal wretch” appeal to the more common emotions (18). The condescending colloquialisms sound like a supernatural warrior torturing a captured slave, as Cleopatra struggles to downplay her fear and powerlessness over death by insulting the tiny “worm.” Her haughty tone toward God and Death recalls her disdain of the scarce-bearded Caesar who would “boy” her greatness. Thus, in this speech, she puts off Isis and

o'er pictures Venus and the moon, in the same way that Hippolyta replaces Hercules with Theseus and bids the moon to change.

If women are ever-inconstant, like the moon, then they cannot commit suicide.

So, Cleopatra unsexes herself:

I have nothing
Of woman in me,
Now from head to foot
I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine (5.2.237-420).

In this disconnection, she also “undeifies” herself. Cleopatra’s people identified her with Isis (3.6.16-19; 3.13.158) and Isis with the moon (Plutarch, *Antony* 54-6). When she resolves to become marble-constant, therefore, she denies the divine in herself in order to receive mortal death. Blits posits that her unsexing and undeifying are related, and Plutarch describes Isis as “the female part of nature, apt for generation...Capable of all, she receives all forms and shapes” (Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 53). This imagery is reminiscent of a Queen of Love, or Venus, or the Church, awaiting her bridegroom.

In the last scene, “love and fighting” according to Fawkner, “are jointed by the absolutely crucial notion of piercing which shapes itself as its opposite” (167). For example, Hercules tore himself to pieces in agony over his lover’s betrayal, but Antony inverts that tragedy to pierce his own body while imagining Cleopatra’s love for him, and dies in her lap *despite* the agony of her betrayal. Fawkner insists that, in order to discuss the final Egyptian dying, we must first understand how negativity can function in two opposite ways in the Renaissance appropriation of the fable of Venus and Mars. One view demonstrates the effortless surrender of Mars to Venus, as Botticelli, Veronese, Rubens, del Cossa, and Piero di Cosimo display. In their depictions, the enchanted, or

sleeping war god has clearly surrendered all of his powers and weapons of aggression to the goddess. Tassi notes that, in Philo's reference to Antony as a Janus-faced monster/warrior, Shakespeare invites us to view the familiar "painting" for Renaissance viewers in "Mars Subdued by Venus" (Tassi 297). Botticelli's Mars appears unconscious, asleep, or dead, after reveling with Venus. Shakespeare opens and closes his play with Antony in a similar attitude. He does not seem to hear the trumpet in his ear, calling him to war, and the bees' combine "sweetness and sting" to emphasize, "a delicate conception of oppositional play" (Wind 85). Here, Venus disarms and absorbs negativity into feminine softness and maternal reassurance.

At first glance, Francesco del Cossa's 1476-84 fresco, "Mars enchained by Venus", appears to depict a tranquil, medieval romantic, love scene. However, on closer inspection, Venus' power over Mars creates an unnatural, insecure, and tense negative atmosphere. This Venus appropriates Mars' negativity through force and enslavement in chains. In this study of the double knot of erotic violence in *Antony and Cleopatra*, it is highly significant that this seemingly tranquil painting depicts Venus on a river barge, and armed Mars kneeling before and beneath her throne *to which he is chained*. In an even more affirming note, which unifies the complementary opposites, the same painting also carries an alternate title with positive female agency: "The Triumph of Venus."¹⁴⁸

Michael Hall explains that "When Renaissance painters and authors show Venus wearing Mars' armor, or Mars chained to Venus' throne, the depiction often carries contradictory messages: one implying condemnation of the relationship by associating it

¹⁴⁸ Kott imagines the play as a huge canvas by Rubens with every place filled. The great lovers are at the center, either raging, loving, despairing, cursing each other, or entwined in a fiery embrace; the Web Gallery of Art created by Emil Kren and Daniel Marx in 1996, records the barge as, "The Triumphal Car of Venus."

with traditional Circe figures, and the other holding it up as a glorification of generation and peace, or as a model of the paradoxical unity of the universe” (25).¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Shakespeare leaves the audience to decide whether Cleopatra is either a gypsy and a strumpet, or the mysterious creature of “infinite variety” who is somehow most holy when most wanton (2.2.246-7); and whether Antony is the “strumpet’s fool” (1.1.13), or “Demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm / And burgonet of men” (1.5.23-24), the modern counterpart of Hercules. One view of the lovers presents a whore and a fool, and the other conveys a supernatural Venus/Circe/Mother of God and her son, the King of Glory. Michael Hall considers both visions of the queen, as Venus, and as Circe, to be true and notes that the text suggests no way for us to bridge that contradiction (155).

It is also interesting to note that Venus’s girdle sports an image of a figure with a bow who aims an arrow at the couple. And, in several of these paintings, Cupid is shown as a nursing baby with Venus, offering her breast. Shakespeare’s Cleopatra offers her breast to Antony, as an erotic lover, and mother, and to death, as a nursing baby, “who sucks the nurse asleep” (5.2.308). In this imagery, Cleopatra is both earthly mother and mother Nature, who appeases death by creating life—by making love. Colie calls Cleopatra “earthy and down-to-earth” in spite of her “all air and fire: with all elements fully active, she is a world in herself” (188).

Shakespeare, as Nuttall and Auden have suggested, takes a light-hearted, dismissive, and, at the same time, serious attitude toward art as it simplifies death and destruction. In both plays, darkness lurks just outside the mythical shadows, but the queens unite the polar opposite worlds of duty and desire to defend and create life. In

¹⁴⁹ See also, Adelman, *Liar* 80-101.

Midsummer, Hippolyta yawns, impatiently, during the play, as if “art is rather a bore” (Auden 319), but she speaks the peaceable communion that Titania enacts by turning Puck’s terrors into blessing for all (Barton *Impulse* 12).¹⁵⁰ Like the “great fairy”, as Antony calls her, Cleopatra revises all ugliness from their story, and recycles the life she received from Nilus’ slime, as Serpent of the Nile, using the same Egyptian symbol of the life cycle. Cleopatra displays a playful, flirtatious, gossip’s attitude toward dying. She flirts with the clown who brings her actual death which she uses to write them both into immortal life in the aevum.

This dramatic ending to the scene emphasizes the playful irrationality of Cleopatra’s love-games with Antony, and more importantly, a gender-change for Cleopatra. In her regal directive, “Bring me”, she adopts a highly authoritative posture and tone of arousal and presents a violent sexual image of Antony as a raped and murdered woman, “taking” or “receiving” her scepter, the phallic spear of death. Fawcner suggests that she is “stirred by the imaginative excitement of embracing Antony’s reception of her news” (126) as a type of game, or violent foreplay. This reading might imply that Cleopatra knows exactly how Antony will take the violent blow, and that Mardian should then bring Antony’s body to the monument. Or, if the eunuch detects foul play in his “foul Egyptian,” Cleopatra wants Mardian to tell him where she is, that he might follow. The news wounds Antony, and causes him to “follow her” to death by wounding himself. Then, he hears of her strategic bluff and, enraged, “takes it” as a challenge. Although mortally wounded, he rallies his battle cry: “I’ll o’ertake thee,” and drags himself to Cleopatra, still fighting, to “bring” each other to “death” on her

¹⁵⁰ Also, Brooks agrees with Chesterton 15; Leggatt *Midsummer* 100, 111; C. L. Barber 139; Kermode 219; and Calderwood 521-22 that “shadows are displayed, so as to be exorcised” (Brooks cxxxiii).

stony couch. Thus, read as a thrilling chase scene, Cleopatra brings Antony, and his death, into her.

Hillman observes Cleopatra's final, hyperbolically theatrical act as the reenactment of her seduction, and birth of Antony, at Cydnus. Her dying statement, "Husband, I come" represents Cleopatra's barge orgasm, and shows that she is, "staking the effect of her total theatrical transcendence on that outcome" (Hillman 332). Her death is a repetition of her faked death when Mardian reenacts her "dying" which he must have witnessed nearly as many times as Enobarbus: "in the midst a tearing groan did break / The name of Antony [. . .] she render'd life / Thy name so buried in her" (4.14.31, 33-34). Antony does the same, in repeating "I am dying, Egypt, dying" (4.14.20). Hillman asserts, "For these lovers, sex is as much of a performance as anything else, including death." (332) Cleopatra's words might double for the "sweating labour" of birth pains. In her, there is no essential division between fake and real orgasms, nor between joy and the death drive, as we saw with Cleopatra's mean games. And so, "Cleopatra's suicide is a repetition of her death drive which is a reverberation of *eros*" (Hillman 332). The Roman Caesar tries to make her body the burial ground for Antony's noble name, but she usurps his power and resurrects Antony's narrative in poetic glory. In this reading, her death seals her as a pious and true lover.

Shakespeare has the warrior women share an analogous spiritual experience in connection with the moon goddess, Diana. Both Cleopatra and Hippolyta seem to replace the moon goddess with men, or at least profess an outwardly Christian view on marriage. In her last lines, Hippolyta, who has always had one eye on the moon, announces, "I am weary of this moon; would he would change!" (5.1.249), echoing Theseus's first lines,

and calling him “Lord.” It is significant to note that nearly all of Hippolyta’s speeches during the play concern the moon, and she applauds it in one of her final lines: “Truly the moon shines with a good grace” (5.1.263-64). This is a significant statement of Hippolyta’s translation from a harsh, stubborn man-hater, to a more graceful wife and potential mother. It seems that she was searching the sky for, and finally receives, a special benediction for her life, and for the man in the moon—her. As her fairy dream-self, Titania fights Oberon’s will as fiercely as we imagine Hippolyta fought against Theseus in the war over Athens. However, she similarly takes her fairy Lord’s arm after the abusive and forceful antagonism ends, the outrageous enchantment is removed from her eyes, and she joins him in their dance of lovemaking, which resets the natural world. In yet another analogous action, Cleopatra stops announcing herself as “royal Egypt” and the goddess, Isis. Her final lines describe herself as a humble, nursing mother, “...a maid that milks,” and her words worship Antony as her eternal lover and mystical husband.

The marriage service in the *Book of Common Prayer* contains the phrase, “With my body I thee worship” (Saccio *Word Part 2* 79), firmly locating and naming sexual love in marriage as a ritual offering of obedient duty to the divine. Saccio states that “The Elizabethans believed that marital sex fulfilled a divine purpose” (*Word Part 2* 79). From this perspective, it is possible to read Hippolyta as converted, or at least mercifully civilized, in her salvific marriage to the great monster-killer, Theseus, unifier of the Greek city-state. However, as Jan Kott’s image of a chained and caged Hippolyta suggests, Theseus’s motives might just as easily mirror Caesar’s analogous action in sparing Cleopatra: to parade the wild beast through the streets of Rome as one of his greatest conquests. Whatever the men’s motives, the warrior queens’ mythopoetic words,

like the poet's eye and pen, serve to shape and name the local characters' love stories on the stage, *and* their universal, allegorical analogies, into a common experience of prayer.

Mills insists that the proud queen reveals the "real reason" for her suicide in her outburst and warnings to Proculeius as humiliation: "Know sir, that I / Will not wait pinion'd at your master's court / Nor once be chastised with the sober eye / Of dull Octavia" (5.2.52-55). Further, "Cleopatra obviously has not given up hope of a future if one can be contrived that is not shameful to her—that future depends on what she can gain from Caesar" (Mills 100).¹⁵¹ In Mills' estimation, the Serpent of the Nile admits no guilt, penitence, or even perception of the fact that she is responsible for Antony's defeat and death, as well as her own dire situation—she blames it on the gods, who "Will have it thus" (5.2.116). Her use of the lines—"It were for me / To throw my scepter at the injurious gods" (4.15.76)—sounds like a similar tantrum raised to a cosmic level.

I argue that, if she could see these events more rationally, she would cease to be Cleopatra, and that her very Cleopatra-ness sets up her unique tragedy. If she were a purely romantic character, like Juliet, she would kill herself immediately for love of Antony, as she tries to describe when she realizes: "We have no friend / But resolution and the briefest end." Mills explains, "the fact that she does not act, *but talks*, precludes any interpretation of her end as a love tragedy" (98). She seems to believe she can create

¹⁵¹Goddard warns, "Those who think that Cleopatra is driven to suicide only when she is certain that she will be humiliated, are taken in as badly as Caesar himself" (Goddard *Vol II* 585). Bradley agrees that despite her immediate theatrical proclamation to follow him in 'the high Roman fashion.' (IV. xv. 87) She "bides her time, looking for a way out. The thing that drives her to die is the certainty that she will be carried to Rome to grace his triumph. That alone decides her" (Bradley 301). Kott believes that Cleopatra understands her power: "She mobilizes all resources, tries all possibilities; she is both brave and cowardly; faithful and ready to betray when she must, if she can sell herself to the new Caesar and save her kingdom" (Kott *Shakespeare* 175). Bradford "greatly fears that if Cleopatra had been confident of Caesar's favor, confident of reigning in Rome, Antony's poor dust might have tossed forgotten in the burning winds of Egypt. And yet, I do not know—who can know? That is precisely what gives her character its charm" (Bradford 529-530).

a new reality by talking her way out of trouble and into a more powerful position. In this way, Cleopatra expresses her genuine character by playing her love games. Like Puck, she simply cannot resist “things that befall preposterously.”

Regarding Cleopatra’s character, E. E. Stoll suggests that she dreams, “steeped in amorousness, and she waits coiled on her couch. She is enfolded in sensuous imaginations to the end” (14-16). Conversely, Goddard considers such views “incredible”, and suggests that the critics who espouse them only see this selfish warrior queen “bent above all things on saving herself from humiliation” (584). Goddard acknowledges that that old queen is “still present”, but suggests that “the new Cleopatra is using the old as her instrument” (584). He asserts, after her third betrayal, Cleopatra has a premonition of what she has done—that by her suicide lie she has thrust a sword into the man she loves as certainly as if she had done it with her own hand. In her hesitation, he suggests, “she deceives not only Caesar but half of the audience and hearers of the play” (Goddard 585). This “art” is no longer vaingloriously exhibited as personal triumph, then, but is art tragically pressed into the service of death.

Bradley remarks that “Many unpleasant things can be said of Cleopatra, and the more that are said, the more wonderful she appears. But what raises her at last into pure tragedy, is in part that which some critics deny her, her love for Antony” (301). Bradley only condemns her for one thing—that she did not love Antony enough to follow him at once to death. Jankowski suggests that “in the end, she is conquered by love and takes her own life in remorse” (106), and by including the word “remorse”, affirms the moral Christian view. Markels asserts that Cleopatra’s death is more romantic than tragic, and hardly a death but an “exalted transcendence”: “a sign of having approached as close to

immortality as a poet may dare to imagine...a transformation of existence into a state of peace where the energy and sweetness of life are at last unfettered” (Markels 9). From this perspective, Cleopatra’s final speech-act figures Christ’s heroic resurrection since “Renaissance Christian belief in self-effacement as the key to transcendence” holds that “overcoming death by denying it, is humankind’s creation of heroic significance” (Farrell *Play ix*). Markels takes a transcendent view of Cleopatra’s death as “a morally coherent event” and “the logical culmination of her life”, rather than simply “an impulsive effort to merely avoid embarrassment at Rome” (147). He asserts that her suicide becomes “a merging of safety and honor which transforms her from a whore to a true wife (147), and thus, “Death confers an earned immortality” (149).

From an even higher perspective, J. Middleton Murry elevates Cleopatra to last-minute rhapsodic transcendence: “After Antony’s death, Cleopatra discerns his royalty, and her loyalty surges up to meet it. No, not *again* for Cydnus: but now, for the first time, indeed. For that old wonder pageant was but a preparation of this. That was an event in time; this is an event in eternity. And those royal robes were then only lovely garments of the body, now they are the integument of a soul” (Murry 375-76).¹⁵² Dickey summarizes that many of the most eloquent including Auden, and G. Wilson Knight, contend that the play “hymns a love so great as to transcend ordinary morality. If the lovers have lost a kingdom, they have gained a more ethereal diadem of love. For life on earth they traded an eternal passion” (Dickey 144).

Frye notes that “Grace in religion implies revelation by the Word, and human grace depends much on good human words” (*Fables* 86). He recalls Kermode’s New

¹⁵² See also Mills 104.

Testament argument for a transcendent ending, noting: “the old dispensation, as the theologians call it, has rolled by, carrying its symbols of the skin-shedding serpent, the sea, the dying and renewing life of the earth” (Frye, *On Shakespeare* 139). When Caesar looks down on Cleopatra’s dead body, he notes that “she looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace” (5.2.344-346). Like a hibernating snake. Thus, Shakespeare affirms his queen as a symbol of the deathless cycle of life, which shows her as a serpent who would catch another victim in its “toil,” in which the audience might hear “coil” of grace. Thus, Cleopatra represents Gaia, Eve, or any other name for the mythical mother of creation, just as Titania does. And, in the Christian festal icon of the “Dormition”, or, the “Falling asleep of the Mother of God”, her death looks like sleep, as well. This “reverse pieta” depicts the divine cosmos, and earthly mortals gathered around her deathbed, just as Cleopatra was surrounded and lauded at her death.

Charney explains that the Elizabethan usage of “grace” ranges from physical attraction and personal charm to pre-eminence of nobility, moral rightness, and divine blessing (21). Cleopatra’s “strong toil of grace” is a mythopoetic union of the immortal she-serpent of old Nile and the magnificent queen who “beggar’d all description.” In the imagery of “toil” as the “sweating labour” Cleopatra describes in loving Antony; the audience may also represent a snake’s “coil” or fishing line. Earlier in the play, she cries out, “Ah, ha! Y’are caught!” (2.5.14), and Charney warns that “we should not overlook the violence in Cleopatra’s ‘strong toil of grace’ and its ability to ‘catch’” (22). However, “Although Cleopatra is heightened by her death, her character and motives remain ambiguous even at the end. She is always both ‘queen’ (female monarch) and ‘quean’ (wench, whore), and in this covert pun lies the secret of her attraction” (Charney 22).

From a feminist perspective, Dusinberre suggests that much of the attention paid to Cleopatra's love in the play exists to conceal "crude buying and selling in which she is only a coin passed between hands" (*Nature* 296). And this might apply to both sexes, given Shakespeare's gender-inversions which display male attempts to politically balance natural female power to create and destroy men. Caesar claims that all women can be bought or won: "want will perjure / The ne'er-touch'd vestal" (3.7.31-32). However, Cleopatra disregards his offers: "He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not / Be noble to myself" (5.2.191-192) (Dusinberre *Nature* 288). She will not be "boyed" or "word[ed]." Her story is shaped like herself—an ancient, transmigrating Serpent spirit who becomes her own great clerk to her own story.

And, like the Amazon matriarch she represents, Cleopatra characteristically rides the patriarchal system. J. Hall suggests that Cleopatra markets, or strategizes her maternal powers, as valuable commodities, or lands to be "ploughed" and produce "crops" for the patriarchs in exchange for political voice (17).¹⁵³ When the queen says "we" who trade in love, it might mean she and Antony. But it also might mean that love is *her* business, since in "us" she might mean "we women" or just herself, as the royal "we." Janet Adelman describes Cleopatra's behavior as bargaining with her "feminized kingdom as though it were her body" (*Suffocating* 191), in the same way that Hippolyta might defend (or surrender) her body as her kingdom on the battlefield with Theseus, and as Titania refuses to concede Oberon sexual access in exchange for her boy: "Not for your fairy kingdom!" Hiscock identifies Cleopatra's suicide as her "final political victory in which she reestablishes her own space" (205), which deprives Caesar of displaying her body to

¹⁵³ Cleopatra had Caesarion by Julius Caesar, and twins, Alexander Helios, and Cleopatra Selene, and then Ptolemy Philadelphius, by Antony. Octavius refers to them as "unlawful issue" (3.6.7).

the world as a newly acquired country, or war trophy. And Hippolyta's marriage may "annex" Athens in a peace treaty.

In an interesting parallel, Octavius tries to project his sister, like Cleopatra, on her barge, when he expresses outrage over Antony's treatment of her as a "market-maid" (3.6.52). He specifies that the trees should bend with men trying to see her, and "with expectation fainted, / Longing for what it had not" (3.6.47-9). These images of her "unpressed" sexual rejection recall and directly reverse Enobarbus' descriptions of Cleopatra's seductive arrival when all of Nature vacated the "market-place" to catch a glimpse of the Great Queen (2.2.222). The word "market" reinforces the demeaning theme of chattel, while images of the women, as Venus, belie the men's understanding that a woman's love contains the power to change the world and specifically create bonds of peace which might end wars and transfigure society. However, Brooks argues that "when we hear Theseus's comparison of lovers and lunatics, it is not surprising that critics are tempted to censure Love itself, along with women for its unreason, and reason the prescribed remedy in silent containment" (Brooks cxxxv).

Cleopatra's "face" represents her sexual "honor" and the messenger suggests that Caesar is willing to remove the "scars" and "constrained blemishes" engraved upon "your honor." When Cleopatra seems to take the bait, the messenger, as an enthusiastic surrogate-suitor, prompts her to name her price: "Shall I say to Caesar / What you require of him? For he partly begs / To be desir'd to give." These phrases from Thidias' master, "the sole sir o' the world" (5.2.120), sound like Caesar is a penitent *female* captive, groveling to gain *her* master's good graces. Someone who "begs to be desir'd to give" is reminiscent of an adolescent male straining to be noticed as a viable sexual partner by an

older woman; or a medieval knight's squire asking his lady for a token to wear, or a task to suffer and thereby prove his love. In this courtly imagery, Shakespeare shows that men fear Cleopatra as an unparalleled sexual fantasy figure, and/or the mythical fanged serpent, and flatter Her to keep their "heads."

Caesar could require Cleopatra to be dragged to him as his vanquished war trophy, but his words ask what she might "require", so that she might desire him. This request is similar to Theseus' "What cheer, my love?", and Antony's "What sport, tonight?" This reading exposes Caesar as a sexually inexperienced boy, or eunuch, who knows he cannot compete with Antony for Cleopatra until he possesses the world. Antony's return only raises the value of Cleopatra's "honor." Barroll suggests that "Perhaps here is another king who understands how the universe is organized, and that Cleopatra's only duty is to assure the proper majesty for herself" (*Dreaming* 156). It is clear that the world actually waits for Cleopatra to speak. They both make bold suggestions, but she is the only one who will decide how, when, and with whom her final majestic story will appear. We have seen that Cleopatra's sexual mystique dissolves male "mouth-made vows" (1.3.30), and she trusts her intuition that even Caesar's Dolabella sees her as his divine ruler when he swears by a "command" which "[his] love makes religion to obey" (5.2.197-198). She engraves her dream-text on his devoted heart as her "great clerk," scribe, or "evangelist."

Charnes suggests that "The connections between the 'epic' narrative of empire and the 'timeless, mythic' narrative of love are imbricated, as Octavius's political defeat of Antony is figured in language similar to Cleopatra's sexual 'conquest' of Antony: both are represented as strategic, and in military terms" (*Love* 275). Charnes also notes that

Cleopatra avoids the pornographic gaze, but it is Antony who experiences himself as that subject, and this shame is *obscene*. Caesar tells his sister: “I have eyes upon him,” (3.6.62) and Antony fears the humiliation as sexual: “his corrigible neck, his face subdued / To penetrative shame” (4.14.74-5). And Cleopatra ruthlessly unmans him in front of the court, jeering over Fulvia’s and Caesar’s grip on him. Charnes points out that this puts Antony in a “subject” position usually reserved for women: “the female captives of the pornographic imagination” (*Notorious* 130). The etymology of “pornography” is “to enslave a female harlot in writing.” This portrayal precisely defines what they both fear most in their final narrative, which they both only escape by Cleopatra’s eulogy, or good words of grace. The Queen avoids this kind of “inscriptive entrapment” from her position of strength “by anticipating what others are likely to talk about her” (Charnes *Notorious* 130), and then becoming something opposite. “Cleopatra appropriates representational systems ‘proper’ to both genders and spaces, loading them into her strategic repertoire” (130).

As Cleopatra intimates in “Eternity was in our lips and eyes”, Antony’s “hope” for immortality lies in Cleopatra’s kiss and chronicle of him:

If from the field I shall return once more
To kiss these lips, I will appear in blood;
I and my sword will earn our chronicle
there’s hope in’t yet (3.13.174-177)

At his death, he echoes his earlier call for one last gaudy night: “Come on, my queen, / There’s sap in’t yet” (3.13.191-192). Here, connotations of sexual and military power are blended in the imagery of phallic swords, sap, and bloody wounds, to transfigure a glorious chronicle, or heroic love story with the necessary female inspiring the ardent struggle for victory. Barroll writes that they “reassert *the Antony* which the queen always

envisioned: the spectacular, rhetorical, colorful man of men, lord over all: a ‘brave’ lord *indeed.*” (*Dreaming* 157) In the spirit of love conquering war, Homan explains, “In the theater, one’s ‘chronicle’ is earned not by the sword but by the playwright’s pen.” Like *Midsummer*, “the play offers extremes in the celebration and condemnation of art and imagination—the very process that calls *Antony and Cleopatra* into being” (191). Thus, the Great Queen creates and bears the hero/god-man. In his dynamic response to her, “If”, Antony unwittingly paints his final scene with Cleopatra which she sees in the vision of his mythic size, and resolves to tell it. This mythopoetic process solidifies their marriage.

Rising blood and “sap”, as emotional ink, and physical courage, all figure in to inscribe heroic victories. The word “brave” in Cleopatra’s high rhetoric, “There’s my brave lord!” means “courageous”, as well as “the one out in front” which has sexual promise in its send-off, both for the outstretched sword and the “brave” male parts Antony connotes when he uses the word as a verb, in place of “defy.” He speaks about Fortune as if she is a woman to sexually conquer: “it is because we brave her. Come” (4.4.4). Thus, even though Cleopatra refuses the titles of “Royal Egypt! Empress!” (4.16.73) at Antony’s death, she still names and costumes her humanity as such, to complete the whole picture of the Eternal Female, as both bodied and ethereal. However, her death is only one of her many deaths, and her final wink against defeat is to disappear completely from the stage as a woman who was never there at all. After all, along with the Eternal Female, she is only an imagined *dramatis persona* for us to consider how to embrace or deny. Yet, Shakespeare leaves the fact of Her power to disfigure or transfigure for his audience to debate, as poets of love.

After their sleepless night's revels, Granville-Barker suggests that Antony and Cleopatra emerge "like a young bride and bridegroom, laughing together at her pretty fumbings as she helps him put his armour on" (*Vol 3* 72). This scene demonstrates the intoxicating, "delicious poison" Cleopatra longs for from Antony's own phallic serpent. However, I suggest that, when they "kiss and make up" from their warring, their love takes the jealous murderer out of both of them, as Venus did with Mars. In this way, Cleopatra's infinite sexual variety goads, and inspires, and recreates him as her "brave lord." This scene provides an ideal example of the Amazon encounter in which feminine Love wins over masculine War. It orders the sexes and produces a female who creates the New Testament warrior champion of humility and love. Antony anticipates his exuberant return when she will "ride on pants, triumphing". Then, they will, again, swap gender roles in love's infinite variety, and "rock the ground" to celebrate Love's wedding dance, as Titania does with Oberon and Hippolyta does with Theseus.

In this scene, Shakespeare clearly joins contrarities within Cleopatra's character, in Pompey's hope that her feminine allure will disempower Antony: "Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both! / Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts, / ...Even till a Leth'd dullness" (2.1.27-28, 31). This dynamic predicts both of their ends, like a newborn after feeding, "Like a baby in a rhythmically rocking boat" (2.1.27) or barge. North's Plutarch and Shakespeare both figure Cleopatra as "that Venus"—the quintessential symbol of female beauty and desirability. She is a goddess designed to build up and complement a Herculean man, and yet, using the same natural womanly gifts, she usurps the most powerful warrior's earthly power, as the deadly asp "sucks the nurse asleep." North's Cleopatra applies the asp to her arm, which symbolizes her willingness to relinquish the

political or military manhood she stole from Antonius and die as his wife. Shakespeare's Queen, however, expands that metaphor when she extracts the last possibility of femaleness from her nursing breast before returning to North's Plutarch and applying another aspic to her arm, as she calls out to Antony: "Husband, I come! / Now to that name my courage prove my title!" (5.2.286-187).

Enobarbus reported that Cleopatra had "pursed him up" at their meeting, like a woman snatching masculine power in her money purse/lips/body, in the same way, and at the same time that he "bit" her with his "lover's pinch[ing]" serpent's fang. It is also significant that the arrival of the basket holds figs and "slimy" serpents, which physically represent sex as a carrier of death and life, in one. Thus, she dies, as both the deadly, masculine-shaped asp, and as the ripe, female-shaped fig whose kisses gently dispatch the pain of her lover's death, to her own sleepy death. As feminine figs tempt lips, and serpents prefer to conceal themselves inside and under tight, dark, warm spaces—Cleopatra figuratively arrived in a basket/barge and lured the powerful warrior to kiss her sweet slime, in order to gently anaesthetize him. However, the human version of the serpent actually pumps sweet venom into its victim in order to paralyze its life-energy. Thus, Mother Nature presents gender fluidity in this ambivalent metaphor on the battle of the sexes.

Schwarz suggests the possibility that "femininity is no more firmly attached to the female than masculinity is to the male", and that "dominant masculinity" might simply mean "the version that wins" (39). For instance, the subtle fluidity between fused lovers' genders is evident in one of Cleopatra's entrances: "Hush! Here comes Antony. / Not he: the queen" (1.2.75). The lines including Enobarbus' mistake and Charmian's correction

are fused, as their master-lovers seem to be, and they sound like two audience members whispering to each other, trying to decide who it is that they see on the stage in front of them. Blits extrapolates that Antony is seen as “indistinguishable” and “inseparable” from Cleopatra (*New* 28).¹⁵⁴ It seems that Antony is “lost.” Cleopatra asks Enobarbus, “Saw you my lord?” but he answers, “No, lady.” His tone might intimate either “No, I see only you, lady!” or “No, I have not seen the lady who is your lord.” This answer might be Shakespeare’s hint that the “lady” is in charge of the lord, who is invisible beneath her self-assuredness. Ironically, however, in a rare moment of vulnerability, she appears distraught that “A Roman thought struck him” (1.2.82), and then snubs him when he appears and punishes him with her absence: “We shall not look upon him” (1.2.86).

This response might indicate fear of losing the love and/or power she gains from Antony. This view inverts Irigaray’s feminist challenge to Shakespeare’s misogyny when she claims that the figure of woman, in his plays, “exist only to validate the male subject” (86). Shakespeare, in a characteristic sly joke inverting patriarchal law, alludes to Plutarch’s “tackles and ropes” (Plutarch 201), again, to draw Antony up to her, as she had drawn him to her barge, for their first encounter. In this imagery, the playwright revises the gender dynamics to emphasize how the feminine force creates, crucifies, and transfigures the masculine in the Christian hero. Both lovers vacillate between gender roles to reclaim political favor with Caesar. Notably, at Actium, Cleopatra’s war games control his very suicide, as well as her own, *and* she “beguiles” Caesar (5.2.321). Thus, as Theseus lifts the laws of marriage to accommodate Hippolyta’s will, Caesar lifts the same law to inscribe Cleopatra’s final narrative. In this way, she defeats, and claims, her

¹⁵⁴ Plutarch noted that she never wanted him out of her sight (Plutarch *Antony* 29.1).

tragic lover's inches, or inscriptive gender power, and becomes her own masculine hero. As Dusiinberre suggested a clever woman might do, Cleopatra "boys" Antony's body to "word" world history to suit her purposes.

As Wells suggests: "Cleopatra prepares for her suicide as if for a combined wedding and coronation" (216) which reinforces my reading of her as an earthly, as well as heavenly ruler, and lover, preparing for her earthly and heavenly bridegroom. Again, Shakespeare adds comic balance when the Clown brings her the "pretty worm" of death in the sexual symbols of figs and snakes, mirroring the Old Testament memory of mortal death cast from Eden, and the New Testament return to paradise in the eternal moment of Love. Leggatt points out that "Cleopatra encourages the asp as she might a clumsy lover: [. . .] Her action in applying the asp to her breast makes us conscious of her female body, as an ordinary stabbing, or poisoning, might not, since that body is anything but marble" (Leggatt *Cleopatra* 250).

Although Caesar's rhetoric celebrates Antony and Cleopatra as the most famous pair, and honors them in "high solemnity", he also hoists them up, together, as moral exempla of the tragedy of excess or political warning against opposing his will. Again, the poet of Love forces us to focus two eyes at once. But howsoever critics may read Caesar's motives, it is Cleopatra's infinite variety of "strange forms" that vie with Nature and compose the art of this play. A modern audience does not buy a ticket to a production of *Antony* to listen to predictable Caesar, or his dull sister, again, but rather to refresh fascinating visions of Cleopatra, in her heavenly mingle, as a golden Venus and a savage fury dragging the messenger by the hair in her human suffering.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Perhaps Cleopatra's outrageous scenes inspired the line from William Congreve's 1697 play, *The Mourning Bride*. He wrote: Hell has no rage like love to hatred turn'd / Nor Hell a fury like a woman

If we, as an audience, allow Cleopatra's poetry to engage or even make love to us, she dies preserved in her text as a magnificent warrior queen. If we stand with Caesar, out of reach of her enchanting wavelength, then she dies a foolish, boyed whore, underwriting Caesar's glory. It is a function of imaginative capacity. However, if we take the latter view, and empathize with Antony's frustration with fortune—"Would that I had never seen her"—we deny the poetry of love which is Cleopatra, and we will have missed a wonderful work of art. We can palpably feel Shakespeare's wink in Enobarbus's attitude, and Cleopatra's poetry creates a reality, regardless of the key in which the audience hears her locate and name it.

It is interesting that Shakespeare mixes both first and third person pronouns in Cleopatra's final orders to her women: "Bring *our* crown and all." In, "Show *me*, *my* women..." and "*my* best attires" her words ground her embodied mortal self in *her* final personal performance in chronos' limited space and time. She sounds like her old defiant, offended self, in a similar tone to that of earlier statements such as, "We will not look upon him", or, "Say I am sick and sullen", made in the effort to control "their" collective feminine response and manipulate male power. In this "our", the royal warrior queen reidentifies with her fellow servant women, "who do the meanest chares" in her own story and elicits their advice and cooperation in her war as their leader.

After four pronouns in the first person (me, my, my, and I) Cleopatra's "our" at the end of the order stands out, especially since she is presumably in a bit of a hurry to accomplish the deed lest she be taken. It seems that after sending them on the errand to "fetch *my* best attires", she would naturally add, "and also bring *my* crown." Instead, she

scorn'd." Ironically, this line is often accredited to Shakespeare in the misquoted idiom: "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

concludes her speech with “our crown *and all*.” In this wording, I suggest that Shakespeare offers us the choice to hear the selfish queen including her women “and all” women to share the glory of her crown as a metaphor for the victory of female independence despite apparent destruction in earthly death as a result of male political power. When her women dress her and crown her “like a queen” she might invite those who have lived every moment with her, as her angels, to represent “*all*” feminized heroes, as women, “bring our crown and all,” and mock the unbelieving Caesar, together, from the grave.

In another example of how mythopoetics function, Kirby Farrell’s guiding premise of play-death is that, in constructing an illusion of death in the theater, people *collaborate* to convert the threat of instability and nothingness into a stable source of fertility: “to make death yield heroic meaning that could sustain society” (*Play* 10). Antony announces he will “make Death love me.” This play-action hearkens back to the female earth mother. And whether the death is real or imagined, the act subordinates the terror and transforms it into a true fiction or real myth. In other words, the plays help deny tragic helplessness and insecurity by imagining a New Testament comic text that asserts stability and value. Farrell explains that “the resulting overestimation of humankind (after death) is often tantamount to apotheosis” (*Play* 11), and represents Cleopatra’s revision of Antony and herself as larger-than-life. Thus, the fear of death precipitates the poetry of creation, which amends the shadow. This psychological dynamic parallels the physical image of the Amazon encounter as the enemies see death in each other’s armor and choose to disarm and bond in a way that preserves the future in a heroic text of friendship. Similarly, on this theme, Cleopatra tells us how she dressed

Antony in her “tires and mantles”, after drunken love-play, as Queen Omphale had done to civilize Hercules. Here, the Queen shrouds the hero in her final words which show them both as Queens of heaven, and brides of Christ.

In conjunction with heavenly grace, the idea of good death in the narrative story, or “eulogy”, is the Greek for “good word” or blessing. These “wishes” happen in the fairy wedding song and begin the Christian Liturgy in which Christ sacrifices Himself, daily, in ritual speech-acts of prayer, culminating in holy communion with the faithful in anticipation of the eternal wedding supper. Bevington explains that in classical, medieval, and early modern thought, “To die well is a commonplace necessity to justify one’s existence and one’s hope of being remembered as a worthy person; to die badly is to put the seal on a bad bargain and to concede failure. The art of holy dying laid its emphasis on spiritual victory and hope of eternal life in heaven” (Bevington *Ideas* 179). He points out that “Shakespeare does not exclude that vision” (*Ideas* 180), as we see in Cleopatra’s language in her final scene. Octavius confirms that their glorious eternal memory shall surpass all others, past and future, in his final declaration: “No grave shall clip in it / A pair so famous” (5.2.358-9).¹⁵⁶ This recalls resurrection imagery, when Christ takes Adam and Eve by their hands and lifts them out of the graves.

It is notable that the Christian Church enacts the similar hope of “memory eternal” by regularly remembering, or re-presenting the names of the “absent”, to keep them mystically “present” in both worlds. Funeral rites also include specially prepared foods so that those still embodied—the promised “bride” of Christ—might fix their gaze on the higher “wedding feast” and be reunited with Christ, the “bridegroom” in the next

¹⁵⁶ For a more dismissive perspective of Cleopatra, Waddington calls Caesar’s eulogy, “A grudging valediction.” (224)

world. Cleopatra marks her exit with: “Now no more / The juice of Egypt’s grape shall moist this lip” (5.2.280-281), which could mean she is sad to leave the earthly creature comforts of Egyptian luxury. However, on another level, Elizabethans might well hear, “I’ll ‘no more’ need to pretend to partake of the ritualized blood of Christ in holy communion, as I am ‘now’ going to enjoy eternity with God in wedded bliss.”

If, as Danby complains, Shakespeare cut out his central Christian heart in this play, I submit that, although he sources mythology in his lovers’ story, the images of love-feasts and death, as hope of eternal reunion with the ultimate lover, might supply enough mystical references to the eternal story to satisfy the Church. For example, *Midsummer*’s lovers *do* arrive at the wedding feast which indicates that the New Testament bridegroom has indeed arrived to love his people. Similarly, the “old man” must be made new in Christian love. And, as it is the same old moon in a new phase, so is each man renewed as a particular soul in space and time, and as a race: a “new creation in Christ” (Col. 3:10).

Frye describes the poet’s mission to recall humanity, in the echo, to the original voice of the golden world, in Eden, after the injury of the fall” (*Fables* 163, 165). Phyllis Rackin’s persuasive feminist reading asserts that “Cleopatra’s wiles identify her with her creator as a fellow artist, who, in her final scene, transforms the brazen world of reality into a golden world of art” (*Golden* 204) (Deats 23). Bloom lifts Cleopatra’s art into the aevum as a goddess:

Cleopatra is as little Biblical as a figure can be, and yet her charismatic intensities owe a strange debt to Scripture. Her final ecstasy brings her to the gods of Egypt, where she belongs. She dies as Egypt, and so she does not die. She has gone beyond the world and beyond theater. Metaphors of the stage cannot encompass Cleopatra any longer, because she has ceased performing. No Freudian reduction is possible, or appropriate, for this

greatest of male representations of the female as it attains apotheosis. Shakespearean paradox, so ample as to contain Freud without being contained by him, has given us a literary character at once totally sensual and totally transcendental. (*Cleopatra* 2-3)

As an example of the fluidity between nature and art in the performance of death in sex, and mortal expiration—the distinctive tone of Cleopatra’s death is that of seamless transition. The moment between the beautiful, breathing queen and the beautiful, breathless corpse seems undiscernible. She was hopping and breathless in the streets. Here, she is breathless, but no less enchanting. The silent, linear asp also represents that seamless exchange of physical elements, or mystical reverse transubstantiation for Christian readers, as she offers her body as a living sacrifice to embody romantic death-for-love, as tortured Christian saints and Antony might have done. The classical mythological reading likens Cleopatra to Harmonia and her serpent husband, as well as the tragic Thisbe who dies by her dead lover’s sword. The lascivious cynic will hear the familiar theme of erotic violence in “dies”, and “sword”, and “serpent”, as another “lover’s pinch.”

Barton addresses Shakespeare’s multidimensional genius in juxtaposing high tragedy and low comedy. Barton explains that “Cleopatra listens, and even responds to the clown’s ridiculous slanders against women,” and flirts with “the kind of sexual innuendo that threatens to diminish the whole basis of love tragedy” (*Divided* 120). This paradoxical event of laughing at bawdy jokes while someone commits suicide parallels the farcical Pyramus and Thisbe production in *Midsummer*. In Cleopatra’s odd exchange, and Hippolyta’s Amazon presence as a new bride, there is a sense of the Eternal Mother in the ancient serpent metaphor combined with the earthy bawd, which draws attention to the profound paradox of sex and death. Cleopatra “dies instantly” at bad news; death is a

phallus with “mettle in it” that “commits some loving act upon her” (1.2.141-144); yet she pretends that she has slain herself (4.13.7). Her “celerity in dying” means that she frequently plays dead to get Antony’s attention, and also that she is often reborn in sexual orgasm. In both performances, she casts Antony as her slayer, soliciting guilt from his affection, and thus maintains her male narrative power.

Cleopatra abuses her dying lover as a betrayer: “Noblest of men, woo’t die? / Hast thou no care for me? Shall I abide / In this dull world, which in thy absence is / No better than a sty?” (4.15.3236-3239). However, the minute he dies, she launches into the high diction of formal rhetoric which instantly transforms him to a god: “The crown o’ the earth doth melt. My lord! / O, wither’d is the garland of the war, / The soldier’s pole has fall’n” (4.15.41-43). In another “odd knot” it is possible to read the whole passage, before and after Antony’s death, as the queen’s raging lament over *her* loss of her sparring partner and sexual playmate.¹⁵⁷ For example, in using the word “noblest,” she refers to Antony’s statement in the first scene that “The nobleness of life is to do thus,” meaning to embrace Cleopatra and “die” in sexual bliss. In Antony’s mortal death, Cleopatra asks him if he would “die”, or why he cannot make love to her again. She blames him for “not caring” as a bored Elizabethan wife would, “abiding” in her “dull” domestic pig-“sty” while her “absent” husband was out “dying” with another woman. When his “rack dislimns”, and he “can no longer” “hold his visible shape”, she jealously chastises his

¹⁵⁷ It is also notable that Octavius’ words over Antony’s body might be exactly Cleopatra’s *if* Shakespeare wanted her to enact an ideal tragic dying lover’s scene. In fact, his words hearken back to her own directions to Mardian, to report that she had died with Antony’s name on her lips. Caesar expresses his sorrow: “O Antony! I have follow’d thee to this” (5.1.3323-33244) and “...we could not stall together / in the whole world: but yet let me lament / With tears as sovereign as the blood of hearts, / That thou, my brother, my competitor / In top of all design, my mate in empire / Friend and companion in the front of war, / The arm of mine own body, and the heart / Where mine his thoughts did kindle,--/ That our stars, Unreconcilable, should divide / Our equalness to this. Hear me, good friends—” (5.1.3327-3337).

male sword in sexually graphic, military imagery, as if their love is a war. His “crown melts”, his “garland of war, withers”, and his lance or “pole” “is fall’n.”

Enobarbus lecherously reports that Cleopatra exhibits “such *celerity* in dying” repeatedly. This word choice suggests Cleopatra’s high energy at the frequent moments of release from the rhythmic thrusts of her lover’s “sword.” As I have addressed previously, this erotic symbolism and imagery evokes love’s battle unto sexual “death.” And on this theme, Cleopatra’s final scene artfully numbs the fear and pain of mortal death and separation with its opposite: anticipation of eternal orgasmic reunion.¹⁵⁸ As Fawcner suggests, “celerity” implies “a superficial kind of immortality” or “ascension” into “a golden overworld” (171). However, he also notes that “on a more subtle level of suggestion, the mythic movement becomes one of eternal recurrence” (177).

When Antony “can no longer”, as “all length is torture”, Cleopatra turns to the carefully selected phallic worm as her new lover, whose pinches similarly “hurt, but are desired.” In the degrading symbol of the “worm”, the warrior queen appears to manage her fear of death by adopting an attitude of “patronizing superiority” (Fawcner 171). At the same time, she minimizes the physical size and state of the snake as a “mortal wretch.”(5.2.298). In these words, Cleopatra sounds as if she is (already) immortal. By this time in the drama, her level of arrogance is familiar, and demonstrates her verbal efforts to outwork nature, in life *and* death. As a physical manifestation of her pride, Shakespeare shows how the queen wars against death’s pain and destruction when Caesar’s investigation reveals, “She hath pursued conclusions infinite / Of easy ways to

¹⁵⁸ The Elizabethan audience would recall and connect this image with the endless eternal orgasm in Dante’s Empyrium. This familiar, albeit Catholic, text supports the belief that the highest spiritual heaven contains love, or God, and thus, a taste of the experience of immortality can be attained on earth by humans through sexual bliss.

die” (5.2.353-254). She discovered the asp’s capability to painlessly “despatch” (5.2.302) death into her, while preserving her life-creating allure. In this way, she literally and figuratively defies death’s violent pain and natural decay as its creator.

Just as Cleopatra misappropriates her rage over Antony’s marriage by abusing the messenger, Shakespeare might show the warrior queen’s jealous irritation with the death she perceives in Antony’s flaccid sword-phallus, in her impatience with the similarly flaccid worm. Her erotically violent words might speak directly to Antony, either in death *or* a love-making scene in life, or both: “Husband, I come”, “Come then, and take the last warmth from my lips” (5.2.290), and:

Come, thou mortal wretch,
 [to an asp, which she applies to her breast] With thy sharp teeth this knot
 intrinsicate
 Of life at once untie; poor venomous fool,
 Be angry, and dispatch. O, couldst thou speak,
 That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass
 Unpoliced! (5.2.302-307)¹⁵⁹

Shakespeare bends Cleopatra’s aggressive words in this passage to address either Death or Antony or both, since both serve as her lover, and both help her to defeat Caesar. It is important to note that she does not die with “Antony” on her lips, as the tragic ideal requires. Cleopatra’s last words evoke images of a victorious warrior leading the enemy of peace in triumph, as Christ leads “embittered” Death in triumph, and his faithful Bride to himself (Papadeas 482).

She treats the worm of death as both her lover and her military ally to defeat Caesar, and provokes it to “dispatch” her and “outwit,” or make an “ass unpoliced”, of

¹⁵⁹ In a Shakespearean wink, Cleopatra’s words sound as though she actually heard Agrippa suggest using Caesar’s sister for, “Marriage to make you brothers, and to knit your hearts with an unslipping knot” (II. ii. 132-34) Cleopatra commands the worm to “untie the knot intrinsicate”, of life, and, in another meaning, to unmarry the men, as well as Octavia.

Caesar, as Christ abolished death. Her action can be read as a warrior's attack on an enemy, as we heard Christ smashing the gates of hell in the Easter hymn: On this theme, Cleopatra sees that death promises a "better life" for her. This view retains Christ, or Love, as the original abolisher of death, but his church bride partakes of this victory as a follower of Love. So, Cleopatra understands herself to exist, now, above the "baser life" of mortal elements, which she "gives", as though she possesses full control of life and death. Similarly, as we heard of Titania's female powers, she claims to transform herself with her words to become "fire and air" and rise like incense, as a prayer.

As another aspect of this death-as-regeneration paradox, Barton points out that Cleopatra reconciles, in death, two more warring images of herself as organic nourishment for men (2.1.116-117; 1.4.31). She wonders if the worm will "eat" her (5.2.270), and the figure of Death recalls the old adage that even the devil will not eat a woman, demeaning her below the demons in hell. Thus, in this last-minute sting, she captures the good death eulogy, and thus avoids that which she dreads most—ridicule after death. She immediately robes herself for her tragic triumph over Caesar *and* Octavia, *and* Fulvia, *and* Death, through her mystical marriage with Antony. In this "flawless farewell", Cleopatra stabilizes, or according to Barton "redeems" and "transforms" Antony's clumsy, messy death (*Divided* 133). In imagining her body as fire and air, the great queen denies the indignity of worms defiling her beauty, and since the devil will not take her, she also verbally escapes hell. Barton asserts that "The ending of his story transfigures its earlier confusion" (133). Hippolyta's words have the same effect.

Cleopatra's fear of "censuring Rome" means to subject herself to official judgment; however, Charnes also notes another meaning that poses a greater threat. More literally, "censure" means "to correct", a revision or recension, especially of a literary work. In other words, the word means "to set firm grammatical limits, to enclose in a formal sentence—to identify: to determine in an 'authoritative way' what someone or something *is*" (Charnes *Notorious* 132). In this sense, Cleopatra censures her own story in her own way. She subverts male narrative power rather than accept a "pornographic" record "i' the posture of a whore," for the rest of official posterity. As Charnes notes, "Her self-staged spectacle denies the voyeur his power—he can narrate the spectacle, but not determine with any confidence its 'character'" (*Notorious* 133). Thus, in her "excellent dissembling" every time her character is played by a boy, "she" eludes judgment, and recension, boying and debasement. In this reading, Cleopatra transcends all tragic female endings, whether in marriage or death. She, at once "deflects the penetrating gaze of the voyeur from the body of her character and disowns it by implying that such conditions do not apply to her elite Egyptian theater" (Charnes *Notorious* 134).

In her anxiety around dramatic "boying" onstage, Cleopatra fears the Roman mechanical boy actors' rules and blunt hammers which she imagines will measure and enclose her in her merely earthly body of baser elements, on their terms, rather than the outsized version of unbounded fire and air she wishes to inhabit for eternity, in her revision of her story. Like the Nile she represents, and the Earth Mother nature, by extension, she wishes to make Antony similarly overflow his measure forever, "as love and grace must necessarily overflow" (Adelman *Liar* 124). In a piece of dramatic irony,

Shakespeare himself can be read as a quick comedian who leads his boy actor playing Cleopatra, in true aesthetic triumph, as he boys her greatness in grand style.

In Theseus's parallel "great clerks" speech, the Duke hardly masks his terror of the Amazon's silent displeasure and attempts to querulously "ask" how his chances of "cheer" might improve. Cleopatra's refusal to submit to the objectifying spies and whispers of censuring Rome can also be read as a resistance to "the sadism of narrative" which "forces a change in another person, a battle of will and strength" (Charnes *Notorious* 134). Cleopatra cannot imagine enduring Octavia's cool eye. Charnes explains that "in Egypt, her 'proper' theater, Cleopatra can alter 'texts' to fit her performance of herself; in Rome, she cannot" (*Notorious* 135).

In Cleopatra's end, "The pretty worm of Nilus" (5.2.243) "eats" (5.2.270) the "Serpent of old Nile" (1.5.26). The action of the "pretty worm" suggests the idea of beauty and youth resorbing the "old Serpent." "He will do his kind" (5.2.262) means that the worm will act "according to its nature: He will copulate with and kill his mate." Here, "the clown conflates the sexual with the spiritual" (Blits *New* 210-11). On the theme of Nilus' slime, the Apocrypha explains that God created Lilith, the demon, *mater malorum*, from the mud after the floodwaters recede, as Antony's pet name for Cleopatra may suggest. Further, this creature is related to the demonic "succuba" who copulates with sleeping men and sucks their blood. Again, the image of the kiss of death, and complete responsibility for evil, is assigned to the wild, impassioned female who disintegrates the unwitting man.¹⁶⁰ Even the Bible opens with a warning: "Now the serpent is more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made" (Gen. 3:1).

¹⁶⁰ In another possible textual link between Theseus and Antony, Kott also notes that, according to folklore, Lilith merges with Helen of Troy, which brings to mind Shakespeare's quip: "The lover sees

The story of a tempting female serpent such as Cleopatra, the Serpent of the Nile, is as deeply rooted in literary myth, as it is in Christianity. For example, the Babylonian epic of *Gilgamesh* features a harlot-priestess whose love gives Enkidu “wisdom and broader understanding” (1.1.20) and makes him “like a God” (1.4.34). Similarly, the serpent in Eden tempts the lovers to “eat,” saying: “then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods” (Gen. 3.5). Kott paraphrases and celibate Octavius understands, “Sex is knowledge, but its price is death” (*Shakespeare* 190). The tradition of blaming the woman for the “fall”—the downfall of heroes, or “death” of communion with the divine—is similarly ancient. Interestingly, Titania invokes this life and death imagery in her seductive speech to innocent Bottom, and her snakey, vinelike twisting movements around his “barky finger.”

Similarly, Cleopatra’s “immortal longings” for her phallic worm whose “biting is immortal...” (5.2.3704-3705) evokes her constant desire for the “bite” of the “lover’s pinch” as well as her resolution for the death it would bring it to her. The Clown explains: “Those who do die of it do seldom or never recover” (5.2.3707). Further, the worms are nested in a basket with figs. This particular fruit might be read to signify either female genitalia or male testicles, or both, which contain all of the critical information necessary to write, or “testify” to a life story: both of which work together to create and destroy. In another significant ambiguity, Kott mentions that the serpent is bisexual in all Eastern mythologies” (*Shakespeare* 192).

Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt” (5.1.11). Although this is sarcastically whined by Theseus as though the first beauty is high, and the second is low, we might also read this as a compliment to Cleopatra, as the most beautiful woman who ever lived, o’erpicturing Helen.

Shakespeare presents the themes of sexual pleasure and death on the physical plane which parallel a metaphorical replacement of old with new on a spiritual level. The old serpent deities return to their original mud (2.7.26-27) along with the crocodiles, in whom “the elements once out of it, it transmigrates” (2.7.45-46). Herodotus records that the Egyptians believe animals are the depositories of the soul and life, and the immortal soul they hold enters the body of another creature just as it is being born (Herodotus 2.65-76, 123). This natural (sexual) transfer of the sacred seems to be what Shakespeare’s Clown calls “the joy o’ th’ worm” whose “biting is / immortal” (5.2.278, 245-6). Again, the highest spiritual themes of eternal life link directly to sexual intercourse as the salvific event common to both death and life.

Significantly, the Clown seems to confuse “immortal” for “mortal.” However, bringing a perspective of Christian mythology to this interchange, the “lover’s pinch” of physical death renews youth and returns eternal joy to the soul. The Clown tells Cleopatra about a woman who “lied” and made a very good report of the worm: “But he that will believe...this is most fallible” (5.2.252-257). Regarding this passage, Blits notes the pun on Adam’s *fall* in Eden as a result of taking Eve’s word concerning the serpent’s deadly promises (Gen. 3:1-19). The Clown, like an angelic messenger, warns: “The worm is not to be trusted...for, indeed, there is no goodness in the worm” (5.2.264-266). The passage also includes symbolic “fig leaves” (5.2.350) to hint at the shameful results of the serpent’s success in tempting the lovers to sin and “fall” away from God (Gen. 3:7).

Just as Cleopatra sought painless ways to die, the New Testament Christ offers a painless mediation to take away the “sting” or painful separation of death from life.

“Death where is thy sting?”¹⁶¹ Christ claims, “I am the resurrection...though he were dead...eternal life” (John 11:25-26; see also 1 Cor. 15:22; John 3:16, 6:40, 10:28, 17:2; Rev. 21:4). This “good report o’ the worm” might refer to the Good News of the New Testament Word, which is Christ or the Love of God. “The old man shall pass away [. . .] put on the new man” (Col. 3:10), recalls Adelman’s understanding “new masculinity” as feminine humility, and graceful reception of death. In this reading, the old creatures of clay (Ps. 40:2), or Nilus’ slime, are transmuted into a newly-wedded bride and groom. Cleopatra dresses for death as for her wedding, and longs for both: “I have immortal longings in me” (5.2.280) and “Husband, I come!” (5.2.286).

In Shakespeare’s mythopoesis, Love or Christ links man to God, or the gods, through death, and “there is no longer any separation, or distinction” (Blits *New* 210). In this view, Cleopatra’s heroic hyperbole of Antony as a thundering, sexual god, and depiction of herself surpassing Venus Amphitrite, is true for all people in the New Testament. As she decrees at Antony’s death: “young boys and girls / Are level now with men” (4.15.66-67). The sexes are neutralized back to Eden’s innocents, and the foreign Others are similarly consolidated in the resurrection: “There is neither Jew nor Greek,

¹⁶¹ Kott traces the Latin derivation of “sting” to *stingere*, as in “instigate,” or arouse, as well as prod, or prick. From this, he offers a double-sided definition of Eros as an “in-stinct” to “sting”: a natural force which “incites,” as well as “bites.” In the French, “sting” is *piqûre*, or *piquer*, which, in addition to phallic pricks and prods, also refers to the actions those nouns produce such as spurring a horse to rear. Both French words are semantically related to the Latin *excitare*, and, *incitare*, which convey that same energy which spurs a body to action, or intercourse (Kott *Theater of Essence* 189-190). The idea that biological instincts incite violence places sex in the center of the natural world where sweet kisses poison, and phallic “pinches” “hurt, and are desir’d.” Thus, the animal urge, and moment of creative union delivers both, “the joy o’ the worm” and the destruction of the beloved who must then die. The phallic serpent’s forked tongue symbolizes this natural paradox of love’s simultaneous delivery of complementary venom and elixir. “The kiss of death” might serve as its emblem. The forked tongue also recalls Cupid’s arrows, in similar shape, but producing opposite results.

there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28-29).

Therefore, through poetry, Cleopatra trusts that her courage to die will prove her “worthy” to become Antony’s wife when she exclaims: “Husband, I come! / Now to that name my courage prove my title!” She longs to please him and imagines that she sees him “rouse himself / to praise my noble act” (5.2.283-284). Similarly, Antony opens the play proclaiming that “The nobleness of life” is to embrace Cleopatra, and ends his life similarly running toward his death and his lover, together, as “a bridegroom in his death and run into’t / As to a lover’s bed” (4.14.101-102). Thus, the demonstration of nobility fluctuates between two impulses toward erotic violence—the sexual act of creation and the deadly act of destruction. Of course, the Clown scene and the whole play can be read without the Christian themes where the worm simply represents the creative and destructive force of Nature which constantly recycles its elements (Adelman *Liar* 166). Either way, or both, Cleopatra’s “passion” ends the play.

Conclusion.

Her Passion Ends the Play

After their revelations, Shakespeare's warrior queens apprehend an end to their military service, and model themselves after the Great Mother. In Hippolyta's sleep of sexual creation and Cleopatra's sleep in sexual death, both end their performances as warriors, in images of the Queen of Heaven. George Steiner describes the echo of the original text, or "the universe, which others call the library, as a single immense tome" conjoining what seems separate and scattered (Steiner *Babel* 72). This imagery depicts the multitude of faithful scribes of this story, as leaves or pages of the book, bound together by love. In this way, every subsequent text stands as a testament to instruct or revise the lost dialogue with the original Word. Speaking the common themes all together, readers revive the memory and rearrange the order of the world in poetry to more closely resemble the image and likeness of the divine poem/poet of love.

In this action, these queens lift the whole society in their authoritative voices to join in the celestial wedding feast of the imagination. This amends the book of "lamentation and mourning and woe" in Ezekiel 2:9, and replaces it with the promise of renewal in Genesis, unveiled in the Revelation, and celebrated in the poetry of Shakespeare's warrior queens. It translates Hippolyta's aggressive and defensive "bow" of death to a new-bent "bow in heaven" and an olive branch of peace, instead. Thus, she accepts Theseus' new "female" key of devotion and commitment, as awkwardly

mechanical and even false as his human efforts might sometimes seem. And, like Christ's holy passion, Antony and Cleopatra's "female" piercings cure the separation of death in the act of love. Thus, when Theseus states, "Her passion ends the play" all of the lovers dissolve the "word of war" into "love's soft hours", and rename and relocate peace in a more harmonious unison.

The Psalmist acknowledges that divine echo, "The Law of God is in his heart" (Ps. 37:31), and the Prophet explains his power: "I have put my words in your mouth" (Isa. 51:16). The verb "seal" means to set down, in the sense of "imprint", and "remember," "store up", "fix", "commit", "bind", "lay up", and "memorize." These words are synonymous with "amend" and "conjoin"—as artisans or mechanicals might transfigure contrarities. These Bible verses support the idea of the Logos, eternally knit in the womb, marriage, and intrinsically knotted in death, to compose the human poem, untie in death, and reweave in myth. Thus, poetry creates reality. Nemerov marvels that "Hippolyta's lines have resonance far beyond the play" (639). He sees "the province of the poetic art, as "the story of the night told over" where "the night" represents a conventional expression for all that human beings act and suffer in the world. That ancient and eternal "one story" is continually retold, or "told over" as she asserts (639).

To clarify, Hippolyta's, "all their minds", includes the far wider scope of "all of the poets who have told over the story of the night." (Nemerov 640) On this theme, Dr. Johnson declares that the royals save their characters' 'species', more than their individual selves. (Johnson 70) Hippolyta specifies that all of the "strange and admirable" chaos of the night is one singular story, rather than plural, different accounts. This concept of multiplicity combines with the simultaneous movement of all of the lovers in

Midsummer through time and space, to converge all together at the Christian wedding feast or pagan fertility rite. This high point of *Midsummer* correlates to Cleopatra's mystical marriage consummation and communion with Antony, and effectively translates the chronological particulars into eternal kairos in the eternal story which happens to all creatures every time, over and over, forever and ever.

In Chapter 2, I addressed the wildly interpretive staging options of Hippolyta's strategic silence in various productions; similarly, Charnes points out that Cleopatra's character also sketches, "a blueprint of transmutability", and that her role is "an infinitely inhabitable theatrical role" for any number of actors. This renders Cleopatra's representational mode "so subversive to Octavius' imperialist project, that it makes it difficult to strategize how to appropriate her as a manageable 'text'" (Charnes *Notorious* 131). But, either way, "Her passion ends the play" (5.1.309). Thus, both queens not only control the patriarchs' attention before the plays begin, but they also end the plays in the spotlight, as salvific Venus, or the Poet of Heaven.

In Shakespeare's canon, Hippolyta's quiet transfiguration might prepare the way for Cleopatra's exuberant message of sex as a type of heaven in mortal life, and thus, isolating feminine self-sacrifice as the overarching action-theme of Love. Like the concept of heroic excess, *discordia concors*, and the Amazon encounter, this conclusion transcends moral judgment as it embraces and simplifies human blots and blemishes in fairy blessings. These supernatural events at birth and death purge mortal grossness, and make defect perfection in the memory of original communion with the creator. Hippolyta's courtroom silence, Titania's shutdown of Oberon's company, and Cleopatra's resolution and ending silence all ring out with feminine force.

Laura Jackson explains that the “healing act of telling” as a “reunion of Being and discourse, in which the man-part of ourselves finally understands the incompleteness of its discourse and lowers its voice to ask the woman-part to join in its discourse” (L. Jackson 260). I hear Shakespeare suggesting exactly that when he specifies that Amazon matriarchal warrior queens oppose his patriarchal authorities—especially two major male heroes out of the actual patriarchal chronicle of the temporal world. In the power struggle against the Other, all four simply lost the memory of the feminine aspects of their nature.

The heroes remember their original mother, as well, in similar glimpses involving sex, but that is not new. As Dickey posits, “Shakespeare dares to defend the illicit...” Laura Jackson asserts that in this healing reunion: “the man-part and the woman-part make each other free.” (qtd. in L. Jackson 261)¹⁶² Dante’s pride is absorbed in his “glimpse” of the Empyrean paradise and requires no further need for language—the reunion is complete in the eternal orgasm. The Old Testament patriarchal Ancient of Days becomes the Eternal Youth in David, the King’s harper, telling the truth in his love story. The New Testament demonstrates how the man-part listens to the woman-part in humble conjoining of parts after the tearing wound, in Christ’s passion. L. Jackson’s conclusion advises, “we must overcome our habit of insisting on the triumph of our differences” or competing, and “remember that we are one Being together, rather than enslaving and silencing one another. Together we are apart until we tell” (260-261).

Recalling the imagery of Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples, Antony rallies his “sad captains” to “fill our bowls once more; / “Let’s mock the midnight bell” (3.13.182-

¹⁶² On the healing power of erotic struggle between the sexes, Irene Dash observes that “Shakespeare presents the conflicts between them, conflicts frequently born of the struggle for mastery of one human being over another. He stresses the concept of mutuality *nourishing* the complete development of each of them” (*Male Magic* 232).

185), as Christ mocks Death. This time, however, Cleopatra does not play the fellow warrior, but serves Antony as a charming, but inept female servant. She does not return Antony's melodramatic farewell, and no longer plays the child after he leaves, but lapses into uncharacteristic silence. Naturally, this event draws attention to itself. Barroll describes Cleopatra's silence as a "vast" emotional inability to understand what is happening inside Antony's "grieving circle of friends" (*Dreaming* 158). The ambiguous imagery of her most recent queenly tirade portrays her as "cold-hearted" despite her oaths calling down heaven's icy hailstorms and feverish plagues if the "warmth" of her love proves cold (2.13.158-167). Her self-cursing rhetoric might simply "word" Antony, in the same way that her scutcheons speech might similarly "word" Caesar, playing up dutiful homage to cover her silent, secret "resolution." And, like Titania, Cleopatra's strange silence might signal her intuition of the "strange and terrible" events to come, like Antony's crucifixion and death, in violent weather metaphors, before she finally remedies their mortal separation in heavenly marriage.

By extension, this reading recalls Hippolyta's silence after the gaudy battle of Athens. Waiting for her wedding, Hippolyta struggles to reconcile the hero with the ass—the mystical communion of immortal myths with the commonplace "mortals on the ground." Hippolyta seems to "remember" her dream of herself, as Titania, when she mentions the "wondrous snow" and "hot ice" of the "tragical mirth" of love and death. Similarly, Cleopatra's silence after their last gaudy night might signal the memory of their first gaudy night on her barge. It might also foreshadow the vision she is about to receive at Antony's death. Before her own death, Cleopatra's language echoes that of Jesus at the Last Supper: "Now no more / The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip"

(5.2.280-281). Similarly, Christ said, “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I shall drink it with you in my Father’s Kingdom” (Matt. 26:29). This refers to the heavenly wedding supper, and correlates to Cleopatra’s vision of heaven as a place in which she is married to Antony. Again, either way, both queens’ passionate narratives open and close the plays.

Using Empson’s view of ambiguity, I suggest that the queens’ endings demonstrate the simultaneously doubled meaning of “passion” as “self-sacrifice” in love and/or death. The first meaning contains the flashing experience of erotic love in the eternal moment, in which the soul apprehends a vision of the second sense of Christian self-sacrifice to reunite with the divine creator or, more simply, Mother Nature. Kermode relates that “Such visions of the last judgment evidently appear to belong to a different order of time than merely successive” (*Sense* 191). It holds both visions of *chronos*, or “now” with *kairos*, meaning “then” and “forever” in the present view. This concept embraces the hopeful end to Old Testament chaos in the New Testament revision of the original force of Love, as Humility and Peace. This heavenly force comes to earth as the eternal Word made flesh, or the embodied spirit, called the Logos, and sees its reflection in other creatures. In the passionate impulse to destroy the foreign threat, the opposing forces of love and death meld together in a type of self-effacement which “becomes” Christ’s passion.

In this way, mortals might abolish the fear of separation and the reality of annihilation in poetic revisions of the eternal story using metaphors, such as Venus and Mars, to represent the actions of the Logos. Harmony is the result of their mythic struggle. Shakespeare’s Amazon warrior queens, Hippolyta and Cleopatra, represent

Venus, that paradoxical female force of creation. As a result of the masculine struggle to destroy the Other, this blinding impulse to reunite with the Logos effeminizes all warriors in deferential worship of the goddess, or Mother of God. In these queens' speech-acts, Shakespeare answers the important question—"Why warriors?"—in the queens' final decisions of similar deference to their divine mission to imitate the "Great Mother" in their living poetry. Their words demonstrate that they, too, might experience visions of their natural earthly positions, and "correct" their lives' courses to reflect that obedience, as an act of pious worship to Love. Because both of these matriarchal warrior queens' dramatic changes specifically include not only sex with the heroes, but marriage, it seems that Shakespeare leans toward the New Testament Revelation, which "ends" in the eternal wedding feast with the Word of Love as the Bridegroom. Both mortal heroes *and* both warrior women drop their masculine aspects to become the Bride of Christ, and thereby create eternal Harmony in the universe.

Similarly, the final poem in the anthology of Scripture is entitled, the Book of Revelation, or "the unveiling." St. John's text describes his vision of the New Adam, or Word of God, reunited with his faithful bride in a wedding feast. In these images, souls can remove the language barrier by setting the Word as a bridge to God in their mouths and thus, reopen the path to peace. The title, "Revelation" asserts that God sent a salvific word to the poet, saying, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), and Shakespeare's warrior queens clear that path. Either way, the Amazon queens might be read as "converted" from selfishness to selflessness in humble relations with Others. However one hears Hippolyta and Cleopatra, their language demonstrates the power of poetry to alter reality and transport the whole story back to the garden of Genesis, as well

as forward to their Revelation weddings with the Word of Love, and as one with their creator.

As serpents slough their skin between rocks, and humans are born and die in wombs and tombs—the warrior queens disarm to expose bridal robes. Cleopatra casts off her garments of earth and water skin to return to fire and air in the spirit-world. Hippolyta lays down her sword and bow and lies down to be slain by love. Both queens end up on center stage in “eternal” marriage beds, as female conquerors in love, as well as prisoners of patriarchal wars. Hippolyta yawns as she falls asleep, and Cleopatra falls, looking like sleep. Both queens seem to reflect each other across time and space which unites them with all females before, in Gaia, as well as the Father Pantocrator. As Hippolyta’s lines claim truth in common experience, the echoed endings confirm the universality of the message. In their transfigurative New Testament visions of the way to revise the old tragedy, the warrior queens relocate and rename themselves in terms of the Essential Mother of God. This smooths the course of love in right relations to the male heroes. Although they remain in the mortal cycle of nature, in patriarchally imposed containers, their new stories and final speech-acts transfigure the old tragedy into a transcendent triumph of Love. In the process of clearing up the “bright confusion”, the new story translates linear chronos into the everlasting joy of kairos.

Therefore, the comic communion of Love destroys the tragic separation of Death, as Venus dissolves Mars, and disarms the enemy Other in sexual bliss. What appears to create chaos and disorder like blind Cupid shooting random arrows can also locate and name Harmony as a result of poetic violence, or “fine frenzy.” The Queen’s kiss of life, and death, transfigures the King, along with his kingdom, into eternal Eden. The

metaphor of willingly embracing and taking in love's wound is tantamount to touching Christ's own pierced body and running toward the earthly and heavenly bridal chamber. In the queens' reflexive analogy, to invite the lover's wound is to receive holy communion, which transfigures the human's being. Thus, the queens' divine visions of marriage transfigure their bodies from instruments of Cupid's and Puck's "jangling sport", into Harmony, as figured images of love. For example, Cleopatra "becomes" her barge and Titania, her bower.

Thus, as figured images of love, the queens reflect the original poet of heaven in the paradox of love, which resolves into the myth of the heroic ideal. Through this process, the figures either transmigrate back down into Nilus' cosmic base slime, as cold, silent morsels for conquerors, or transubstantiate back up, as fiery, airy brides, to receive immortal communion with the divine Bridegroom in the eternal wedding feast of the Revelation. Either way, at the end of their plays, both wily queens might be understood as successfully contained. Even if she is unhappy after her marriage, Hippolyta is no longer a foreign novelty, curiosity, or monstrous "Other." She is a poison purged—depleted of destructive powers by Theseus' phallic spear—which acts like Cleopatra's "lover's pinch." Order is restored to Athens, and the ruler's power is strengthened and protected with the enemy as his new bride. Similarly, even if Cleopatra simply lies dead, she returns Antony's phallic Phillipian, and eulogizes his eternal erection.

The Amazons' poetry seals a New Testament ending which affirms and transmutes the original sacred ancient warrior serpent, Gaia, into the original holy Mother of God. The tired old virility-killing dowager Eve in "old petticoats", is recycled as the moon-goddess, to a fresh, young, willing virgin bride who produces a baby boy savior.

Thus, Shakespeare demonstrates how the classical myths and Biblical figures continue to enact the eternal story through history, as works of art, but also offer New Testament meaning in Kermode's sense of eternal communion of love with God, back in Eden, on the barge for Cydnus, in the fairy bower, and on the mountain with the transfigured Lord.

So, although the feminist and misogynist critics might be right that the patriarchal system crushes any permanent disruption of male power, Shakespeare's warrior queens' poetry expresses the dream-memory of Love as death to self, or the inherently female duty and desire to die for the Other. By making his queens militant matriarchs, and his male heroes doting lovers, Shakespeare inverts imaginary gender constructs to demonstrate that any mortal, regardless of sex, naturally identifies with the masculine spirit of war, and can be read as a beastly threat to be contained. However, Shakespeare shows that Love transcends masculine destruction despite its paradoxical necessity, as Venus transfigures Mars, and the mortal couples imagine eternal bliss in pious deference to the divine free will of the Other, according to their dazzling glimpses of eternity in each other's lips and eyes.

Before the events of the plays, Shakespeare's legendary male heroes demonstrate that they have already been emasculated by this golden moment in which they comprehend "some bringer of that joy" as the Essential god-bearing Female ruler of the universe (5.1.20). And, although Hippolyta and Cleopatra spend most of their plays displaying the mortal death they carry, in the ancient serpentine nature of the uroboros, they suddenly appear to return to their selfless feminine hearts, and celebrate their choices of containment beside their conquerors, in the ironically passive spirit of all-conquering, triumphant Love. In this paradox, they embody both sexes. As women in a

patriarchal society, they appear contained by men, but they also contain the men in their womb/tombs, inverting conventional gender binaries. Therefore, both genders figure the paradoxical Essential Female, in Christ, who willingly contains Himself in Death, in his redemptive self-sacrificing speech-act, and so transfigures the tomb into Love's eternal, resurrectional womb.

In that role, when the defiant warrior queens apprehend visions of their own men as heroic lovers, rather than asses or gorgons, they contain and absorb the masculine in both sexes, and deify both warriors as one, all-conquering and triumphant allegory of Love in marriage. In this way, *all* mortals, full of "vile" death, "become themselves" "in her"—the spirit of the Essential Female warrior queen. This creation transfigures earthly defeat into blessed solemnities, eternally knit in marriage which imprints their noble deaths in the aevum library. The queens' poetry also represents the *New Testament* visions of Love, and names and locates them all, together, as the Bride of Christ. Thus, the warrior queens imitate the heavenly bodies' plan when they consent to marry the ultimate hero-lover, Christ, and set their final narrative down in the eternal Book of Remembrance at the wedding feast of the Revelation. Thus, in that stillpoint moment of creation—the mythopoetic marriage of heaven and hell—Shakespeare, as the inkhorned scribe of Love, compresses *all* lovers, as warrior queens, into the original Poet of Love.

Prayer provides the connective ritual transaction between heaven and earth, analogous to the church and the theater. In his love story of divine comedy, the Poet of Heaven calls us, above all, to remember the memory of the creator as "the one thing needful" (Phil. 2:9). In the figure of the *pieta*, Antony left the wide world to pray "in secret" (Matt. 6:6), in his "space." He found his world in her body, and returned earthly

duty for desire in this act of poetry. Cleopatra echoes Antony's "return to the gods" or Logos (Steiner *Language* 196), in her "immortal longings" and suicide. In, "vilest things become themselves in her" Cleopatra looks to her man as to her heavenly bridegroom: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3). The NEB uses "transfigure" instead of "fashion", and since poetry is the creator of all things, then poetry is the working power by which all things are changed. So, after her mountaintop vision of this transfiguring power, Hippolyta agrees to knit herself, eternally, with Theseus.

And, in that mad moment of "Yes", Shakespeare's warrior queens, as lovers and poets, relocate themselves in the stillpoint of the eternal womb, and give birth to deathless freedom. In this metatheatrical speech-act of watching and praying (Luke 21:36), the playwright of Love naturally moves us to take down the walls which parted friends, and similarly move our neighbors to "new amity", "joy", and "fresh days of love." Ephesians 2:14-16 reads: "For He Himself is our peace who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, abolishing in His flesh the enmity..." Thus, are we transfigured so, together.

Epilogue.

Take Hands, All

Charnes agrees with Nuttall, Kott, Taylor, and Montrose when she summarizes the persistent problem that the patriarchy continues to contain women in heterosexual boxes, and punish those outside of that model. “These plays still contain something of the monstrous in them—something about which they warn—the image of that horror of patriarchal capitalism. And that it is the inevitable pathological effects of a culture that markets ideologies of absolute freedom and endless self-invention to the very subjects which it continues to demand properly ‘identify’ themselves” (*Notorious* 153). Green condemns Theseus’s marriage to the Amazon queen as a “misogynistic normalization of her former autonomy” (392, n. 26), and summarizes: “the play is designed to foreclose all erotic unions that do not lead to socially sanctioned, marital procreation” (370) and also to “curb” Puckish pleasures in “those things... / That befall prepost’rously” (3.2.120-121). Green’s contemporary, Garner, adds her feminist view that “the end of the play affirms patriarchal order and hierarchy and insists that the power of women be circumscribed; it *recognizes* the tenuousness of heterosexuality, which must be enforced” (Garner 84).¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Adrienne Rich calls it, “compulsory heterosexuality” in her 1980 feminist essay. See also Traub *Desire* 107.

Robert Crosman asserts: “Montrose is trying to shake us awake from the bad dream of patriarchy” when he argues that “the festive conclusion depends on the success of a process by which the female pride and power manifested in misanthropic warriors, possessive mothers, unruly wives, and wilfull daughters are brought under the control of lords and husbands” (Crosman 7). Montrose hears, “little if any sign of genuine structural transformation” (*Stories* 129). Girard describes Hippolyta as, “gently tugging at Theseus’ sleeve, but the Duke hears nothing. Posterity hears nothing. Hippolyta has been tugging at that sleeve for close to four hundred years now, with no consequence whatever—her words forever buried under the impressive scaffoldings of Degree once more triumphant in the guise of rationalism, eternally silenced...” (Girard *Myth* 36). However, I conclude that Shakespeare’s queens verbalize an ancient form of feminism which might be termed radical, toward which some modern scholars, directors, and critics might hint.

For example, in Emma Rice’s 2018 Globe production, Oberon acts the priest distributing a Protestant Eucharist among the actors and the members of the audience. This suggests that the juice of England’s grape doubles as the spirit of love in of wedding celebrations on earth, and heavenly communion. In other productions, the fairies come into the crowd to “take hands” which evokes the same event. As Puck sweeps away the “remembrance of a shroud” (5.1.378), he might be read to bury the old spectres of war in a new harmonic “key” after the wedding revels. Or, in Green’s new queer reading, the domesticated male figure clearing out dusty old ideologies might signal a change in patriarchal re-vision of traditional gender values in society. From a religious perspective, he “prepares this hallowed house” (5.1.388), figuring the home as a church, on earth as it

is in heaven, and asks the androgynous spirit-beings in the audience to forgive his offenses.

Humble Snug the effeminate Joiner is given the lion's part to play, and immediately reassures the ladies in the audience of his truly gentle spirit's identity, that they should not "quake and tremble here / When the lion rough in wildest rage doth roar" (5.1.223-224). The lion threatens Thisbe, in the mechanicals' play, but here, the poet also reassures the lovers in the immediate court, as well as the "larger" audience, that they will not be "devoured" in tragic death in their lives, together, if they "see" rightly, and stay snugly joined. Sensitive Bottom, the weaver similarly pretends to have a tyrant's heart, but his actions respect and protect the ladies "whose gentle hearts do fear / The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor" (5.1.221-222). And Puck's final speech reassures them of that protection: "Not a mouse / Shall disturb this hallowed house" (5.1.379-80). The poet points out that the communal experience of dramatized, tragical mirth carries the lovers' "real-time" story to "fairy time" (as it does the outer audience, at the same time) when they can safely go to their "hallowed" beds.

Buccola also states that "despite its pagan setting, *Midsummer* is 'book-ended' with references to Christian teachings" which implies that salvation includes conjunction with the feminine force (*Fairies* 78). She observes that "it is significant that the green world to which the lovers fly is a matriarchy, albeit one in the throes of a temporary period of misrule by its king" (*Fairies* 65). Here, Buccola implies that, since the mortal world parallels fairyland, the mortal world is also similarly "temporarily misruled" by the patriarchy. Montagu states outright: "Women know what love is. Let them not be tempted from their intuitive knowledge by the false idols men set up for women to

worship. Let them not do violence to their inner nature, and help them realize their potentialities for being loving and cooperative” (289). His fervent prayer begins with a positive, radical feminist statement, and continues in a directive tone of protective encouragement to the bullied females. Then he emphatically repeats the optative, “Let them not”, in the same tone as Cleopatra’s, “Let Egypt melt into Nile” if her love for Antony prove false. Montagu’s usage recalls Antony’s, “Let Rome in Tiber melt” in disregard for patriarchal Rome in protection of his love for Cleopatra. Here, both Montagu and Shakespeare seem to join voice-forces to defend and overturn patriarchal gagging and hobbling of natural feminine power.

Both plays revolve around the queens whose mythic-sized men fight to belittle, or “boy” them. The fact that, in the original productions, boy actors voiced both the redemptive heroine and the men who worship her, is significant. The experience of playing Amazon warrior queens mirrors the theme of patriarchal containment, in real time, for the actors. For this reason, I believe that Shakespeare understood and counted on considered the transfigurative effect that speaking those parts might have on the whole male company, some of whom might become future rulers. In this way, he is a kind of “parent and original”, creating societies with a new version of masculinity which recalls the original, for those who would hear.

It will require a feminine leap of faith and grace on the part of both sexes to allow the angry people of all genders, and races, and ages, to stand up, after being knocked to the ground and held under the perpetrating boot for so long. And, it will require another kind of spiritual revelation for both sexes to apprehend and integrate the feminine grace to offer and receive mercy, and move forward in free will choices. This reveals the magic

of mythopoetics. The text of the imagination of the divine Word represents the revelation of the law that society might implement to reflect the Logos as we understand it. The monastic theologian who has dedicated his life to Christ and His Mother, as his “true parents and original”, insists that, when we dream a vision, or receive an intuition, we must superimpose it on Christ, the superhero of feminine powers “who received his human nature from his Mother” (Vlachos 23). If the energies align, we can proceed with confidence in that relational direction, but if it involves discrediting, dislimning, or dissolving, another person’s vision of heavenly freedom, we can be sure it is not a creative version of divine Love, and abandon that ideology.

In my reading of the plays in relation to mythopoetic speech acts and Christian imagery, the male tyrant-heroes who claim to love Shakespeare’s warrior queens seem to offer to help the women, and even beg their pardon, as goddesses. However, the women continue to defy until they receive moments of grace that transfigure the men into lovers. In the imagery of the New Testament book of Revelation, the transfigured serpents figure the Bride of Christ in their visions of earthly love. Thus, Theseus’s new “key,” Antony’s “new heaven, new earth”, Hippolyta’s “transfigured so together”, Titania’s “purge thy mortal grossness”, and Cleopatra’s “eternity was in our lips and eyes”, all point to a New Testament of love as the homeopathic cure for love’s wound.

As a paradoxical symbol of humility, Shakespeare alludes to the conquering blood of Christ, as the mythopoetic speech-act which links heaven and earth when the archenemies of the world gather all together in the galley scene before the war. Antony imagines friendship in his metaphor of love as wine: “Come let’s all take hands / Till that the conquering wine hath steep’d our sense / In soft and delicate Lethe” (2.7.105-107). At

scene's end, Antony suggests they "drown consideration" (4.2.45), or put differences aside, and end them in loving communion, as he does with Cleopatra in "love's soft hours." This parallels *Midsummer's* final words before sleep, when the fairies echo Hippolyta's pivotal speech. Oberon insists, "Take hands with me," and Puck proposes: "Give me your hands, if we be friends / And Robin shall restore amends." In this way, after the daylight war is similarly "steep[ed]" in nights of love to "dream away the time", enemies are transfigured together.

The literary experience of the imagination provides glimpses of the eternal moment in both heaven or hell, "and demands that we keep looking steadily at both" (Frye *Imagination* 97-98). Gayatri Spivak suggests: "What we need to begin a feminine discourse is a revolution from a phallocentric formulation of femininity as absence to a gynocentric language of presence" (qtd. in Gohlke 164). As Dusiinberre insisted, it is Cleopatra who dissolves Antony, and Cleopatra who is alive alone on stage for all of Act 5, after his death. In Adelman's feminist reading, she argues that the actor's apology for squeaking his part actually draws positive attention to the female character and what "she" achieves at her death. Adelman's view "reinstates female presence...over the body of the male actor, calling to attention *his* deficiencies, not hers" (*Suffocating* 24). The squeaking actor acts as a great clerk or recording angel to the goddess. And, it is Hippolyta's silence in court that alerts Theseus that he is "off." She has the actual presence of mind to oppose him, effectively, and restore love and safety to society. In the final scenes, Hippolyta is the only female who actually speaks in the world of men—the Duke's court. And even the male spirits echo her words. Cleopatra wields that same power.

Marshall posits that *Midsummer* “places in radical question a social institution that embodies relations of power, and stages conflicts of imagination, voice, and vision” (101). As the mechanicals sew, repair, weave, and join, Puck’s epilogue offers twice to “mend” (5.1.413, 419), and twice more promises “amends” (5.1.2286, 2290). The ending literally and figuratively transfixes the hearers to one spot and joins their minds in a common vision, as does Cleopatra’s end. Theseus continues to deny the lovers’ waking “fantasies” (5.1.5), but Hippolyta remarks on the strange, compact vision that could be carried across imaginary partitions and shared between apparently separate worlds, just as Cleopatra asserts. Love’s wide net gathers the mythopoetical vision, “seeming parted, / But yet an union in partition” (3.2.209-210).

As I have suggested throughout this thesis, the transfiguration of minds in dreams or stories presents a double prospect in the sense that it might mar as it marries. *Mardian* is “marred” as a matriarch’s slave, whether willingly or no, in the same way that marriage might mark and disfigure women in unwanted sex and pregnancy. After their dangerous sport, Theseus, Oberon, and Puck suggest that love’s injuries will heal, or “restore amends” if we “take hands.” This prescription recalls and enacts Hippolyta’s message of transfiguration, whether anyone hears it or not. And, it might mean that she accepts Theseus’ proposal in a new “key” as “amends” for her injuries. Like Dolabella, Hippolyta responds to the religion of Love she, too, must obey. Because of the weight of authority these characters carry, Shakespeare points to acts of grace and forgiveness as healing “tricks of strong imagination” which quiet jealous squabbles and restore the proper balance of sexual power in society. Thus, we might shift hierarchical beliefs and thought

patterns to transform the cultural habit of patriarchy to imagine a new relation between the sexes.

As Montagu suggests, the feminine peacemaking power informs the masculine, and when Theseus complains about the mechanicals' performance, Hippolyta tells Theseus: "It must be your imagination, then, and not theirs" (5.1.209-211). This correlates to shifting power differentials, in that responsible rulers of either sex must hear the feminine force in them, to create a new heaven on earth, in society, and so civilize bad acting. In these profound paradigm shifts in habits of imagining the world and its gendered hierarchy, Gohlke suggests that "literary conventions may then be viewed as responsive 'codifications' of these imaginative habits" (163). But more than simply mirroring, Shakespeare's depiction of the ways these aggressive warrior queens represent and negotiate power within the patriarchal structure might even precipitate new perspectives on this modern, and age-old discussion, and provide a therapeutic experience for both sexes. Schwarz reiterates why imagination is the central theoretical and literary tool to define, or write the social structures and laws, as Hippolyta prescribes:

Generic categories, like those imposed by socialized desire are not natural truths or even structural certainties, but the products of imagination. 'It must be your imagination, then' should perhaps replace the lines concerning 'great constancy', that made Hippolyta this play's dramatic theorist. This skeptical comment on the power of imagination—and perhaps on the imagination of power—is her own theory of drama, and it illuminates the sense in which any exemplary reading of her role must be attributed not to myth, or generic convention, or even to Shakespeare, but to us, the imaginers. (Schwarz 234)

On a positive note, Theseus appears to take on Hippolyta's power of imagination and suggests that the hearers will need to "amend" the "worst shadows" (5.1.209-11).¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ See also Berry 144.

Theseus encourages people to be generous and try to find the piety in their sincere efforts of duty to their benefactor: “Our sport shall be to take what they mistake” (5.1.90). Here, the use of “sport” sounds sarcastic, and Theseus more pompous than ever. He also dehumanizes the artisans as “clerks” performing roles, although they identified themselves by name, as people. However, at least he is using his imagination to amuse his ego. Levine suggests that Theseus glosses over his entitled rape of Hippolyta, and calls for festivities to strut his military masculinity in the double victory (216). However, a Christian reading might hear him sheepishly asking Hippolyta to forgive his bad form acting, or debts, “as we forgive our debtors...” (Matt 6: 9-13), in the tradition of confession before the sacrament of communion of which they are about to partake. It is also significant that Cleopatra uses this word to acknowledge her weakness. She entreats Antony, “Forgive my fearful sails”, and similarly acknowledges her “debt” to Dolabella, which further evokes the Lord’s Prayer (5.2.204).

In, “Give *us* this day...and forgive *us*...as *we* forgive...” the collective supplication works vertically and horizontally, as the Christian symbol of the cross signifies relationships with God and one another, and is clearly meant to call down power, or “transfigure so, together.” The faithful ceaselessly repeat the prayer¹⁶⁵ until the soul remembers and recognizes its identity in the Being, or rekindles the original spark of cosmic Love which moves all things. Dante depicts his sinners wending their way up the mountain of *Purgatorio* chanting this prayer, all together, as a way to “purge” and heal their separate and particular temptations that cause strife between people. And, he imagines that the entrance to *Paradiso* contains a breathing marble-constant sculpture of

¹⁶⁵ One aspect of prayer includes “dramatic reenactment of the desired outcome” (Zaleski 41).

the Annunciation of the Mother of God, which indicates that both sexes might find heaven in female action of receptivity to the divine will.

Like Dante's connective prayer-texts, Kepler, Shakespeare's contemporary astronomer and mathematician, agreed that "the sparks of Divine speech could be found in the harmonic order and celestial music of the spheres." (qtd. in Steiner *Grammars of Creation* 65) And Nuttall concurs with Frye that Shakespeare found in Ovid, a *carmen perpetuum* (1.4), a timeless 'perpetual song' made out of old Greek endlessly ramifying myths, those things which, in the words of Neoplatonist Sallustius, 'never happened and always are.' (qtd. in Taylor *Shakespeare and the Classics* 213)¹⁶⁶ Thus, redemption might be found in harmonizing language with the Logos, in the heavenward movement of human understanding—the "moto spiritual", or, "story of creation and the afterlife. Steiner explains that, as Cleopatra and Hippolyta demonstrate in their poetry, "Dante's connections between 'here', and 'there'", constitute an act of veritable creation." (Steiner *Grammars* 78-9) Thus, time is easily compressed into an act of imagination.

If Theseus's softening change is genuine, then his action reinforces Montagu's and Gohlke's reading of the "feminine" values emerging from the plays as "dissociated from the traditional masculine categories of force and politics [. . .] focused instead on human relatedness: the values of feeling, of kinship, of loyalty, friendship, and even romantic love" (161). Although the actor playing the Duke is usually directed to deliver his lines with sarcastic condescension, Shakespeare gives Theseus lines which might just

¹⁶⁶ Taylor explains that Nuttall summarizes the poet's special blend of classical training this way, "If Shakespeare got his Greek mythology from a Roman, (Ovid), let us not forget that he got the concrete Roman history from a Greek. (Plutarch). And, indeed, just as Ovid may have been sharply aware of the Hellenism of his material because he was a Roman, Plutarch may have had a Greek's special awareness of the macho militarism and rigidity of the Romans." (Taylor *Shakespeare and the Classics* 214)

as easily support the artisans, or “mechanicals”, as “great clerks” who offer their best as duty to him, their creator, as “made men” (4.2.17). In this way, the Duke acts as the birthing parent.

Shakespeare reinforces the metaphor of birthing through language when Theseus deems their art “notably discharged” at the play’s end (5.1.352). Shakespeare’s audience would readily hear: “Well done, my good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of your lord” (Matt. 25:23). Hinely suggests that, in *Midsummer*, “Patriarchy is transformed as the men offer their women a loving equality founded on respect” (137). Similarly, as she closes the historic curtain on three centuries of Ptolemaic rule, and three millennia of Egyptian pharaohs, Shakespeare’s Charmian lauds Cleopatra’s performance as “well done, and fitting for a princess / Descended of so many royal kings” (5.2.324-25). Caesar admires her as “Bravest at the last / ...and, being royal, Took her own way” (5.2.333-35). And even male-oriented Plutarch acknowledges “her action befits her ancestry” (*Antony* 86:4).

Like Theseus’ relaxing his airs and scooping up the lovers to all marry together, Antony dresses down among the commoners, and endears himself to them. The warrior queens inspire these equalizing actions. Like Antony, Theseus stops rattling, like thundering Zeus, and chats, jovially, with the players, and the lion, and the moon, as if they were one family at a midsummer fertility rite, or Christian wedding. “Times change”, and Kermode holds that “our need for concord-fictions increase as we struggle to make sense of new varieties of discord. For some, literary fictions arrange our complementarities better than history, perhaps better than theology, largely because they are consciously false. We are surrounded by chaos and equipped for co-existence with it

only by our fictive powers. From this the poem springs” (*Sense* 64). And, Shakespeare the Poet gives us warrior queens who embody the original female poet, or creatrix.

Throughout this thesis, I have addressed how patriarchal rule was established and is constantly reinforced, and reiterated, in texts, to control the conditions of power—the female reproductive body. Now, it is possible that future texts will begin to rethink the necessity of the marriage “bond”, and liberate society from the ancient fable, or fairy tale men have told since the cosmic origins. Perhaps Shakespeare’s queens’ message and the abundance of feminist and queer criticism has begun to percolate into society, and bury the familiar Egean “good ol’ boys” rhetoric.

But, on our topic, for instance, women (and some men) have insisted on votes for women, and rewritten legislation, as voices to protect female economic independence during the childbearing process to enable women to support themselves without men. Modern women may choose to avoid men from conception forward, if they choose, and may even choose to adopt, or protect, a changeling child out of compassion for the motherless babe, or to protect their own bodies from disease, disfiguring pregnancies, or death. The traditional, heterosexual, patriarchal view might argue that the family is already being reconfigured by tempestuous females raging out of domestic teapots. This may be how society enables bitter (hurt) females to destroy the family, by trying to defend the boys from becoming warlike masculine figures, as Oberon accuses Titania.

Modern science (and protective legislation) has made it possible to remove the two sexes from each other’s proximity, but a male cannot require any woman to carry his child, and the female can actually choose the characters with which she will imprint her child, removing the political, legal, emotional, and social constraints of marriage with a

male. She may even choose to live with a woman and never give the father of her children any textual, or narrative power, at all, since she is free to support her own lifestyle with an education, and a career, like any man. However, “when women adopt the ways of men, tragedy becomes the dominant story, and we build our addiction to violence. However, in “the late plays, Shakespeare’s women redeem the father’s violence and bring the world to an understanding of love—they hold the key to social transformation” (Packer 297-298). They suggest ways of healing past injuries in healing language. Bevington speculates that Shakespeare was using these devices to close the circle, “in the large architectonic sense of rounding off his artistic career” and that “the obvious similarities of these late romances to Shakespeare’s earlier comedies brings the wheel full circle for Shakespeare: in his end is his beginning” (Bevington *Ideas* 189).

Packer suggests that, in Shakespeare’s process: “He gave the women the words to expose the dichotomy between what lay within and what was expected from without. He could feel the truth in his body, and record what he saw,” bridging heaven and earth with those speech-acts of love (299). On the mountaintop, Amazon Hippolyta recalls a memory of love which might instill a hope of future heaven in a revised version of herself, “eternally knit” in love. Cleopatra similarly apprehends a glimpse of herself as a woman without her great warrior-love, and joins him in faith of their love for eternity through her courageous act of creating her own ending in her mystical marriage. Thus, both sexes support and receive the other, as itself. The opposites draw near, in fear, and faith, in Mother Nature.

Addressing the same theme from a different perspective, Green asserts: “The solution to the battles lies with changes in the rulers themselves—a proposition at once

seemingly radical in identifying the source of the problem as yet hopelessly contained within and supportive of the status quo” (377). The rulers who write the rules to protect their rule must transform themselves from asses to epic heroes to save their people. They must recognize their own rhetoric as the dragon to slay, and revise that ancient text to realize a new vision of freedom from bondage. Blits suggests that the Roman warring spirit “seems to turn against itself and become spiritualized, replacing pride, honor and victory with humility, abjectness and suffering as the highest good pagan spirit, directed inward and against man’s worldly nature, *becomes* Christian spirituality” (*New* 9).

Christianity’s first and greatest commandment is love (Matt. 22:37-39) and even Caesar’s Dolabella swears by love’s higher “command” (5.2.197). Blits explains that the world no longer needs the gods to protect its “martial way of life” and “earthly glory”, but rather a “a universal god of peace—a god supporting the habits of humility, submission, and patience, not of pride, political strength and warlike action” (*New* 2). By conquering the world, “edge to edge” (2.2.122-23), all of Rome’s enemies become Romans, like “vilest things / Become themselves in her,” leaving no one left to hate, so all of mankind must be loved. The foreign Other is assimilated into concord, as Schwarz’s Amazon encounter extends to understand that “the Roman principle of war produces a religion of peace which is at once particular and universal, and its new heaven mirrors the new earth. The next world replaces this one” (Blits *New* 8).

Antony’s first words begin the play’s numerous New Testament allusions when he states that Cleopatra would need to find “new heaven, new earth” to contain his love. The Book of Revelation promises: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away” (Rev. 21:1). The Christian Church worships

and tries to model itself on the Mother of God's mortal embodiment, Mary, for her willing obedience to bear the savior in her womb. In his death, her Son would later bear the weight of the world, or mortal grossness, or sin, mirroring Mary's humility and service to her Nature. Thus, both original parents defer to the salvific feminine ways, and dissolve the power struggle in peace.

As feminists assert, women must not allow themselves to be shamed into subservience to men or forced into or away from expressing their natural function by those in authority. The womb and the barge function as a home and the seat of procreative potential, and women must trust the vision of the creative potential in their bodies as a gift from Nature, rather than a dirty, shameful inconvenience. Women must locate empathy for the jealous Oberons in the world and teach them how to make the world more generous and compassionate. Montagu warns that it is a "false view" that women should be "liberated" from motherhood. Women should not compete with men, or try to outdo them, but cooperate, as their biological system is designed to do—"to make human beings out of people" (Montagu 232). Men must understand that it is not their occupation that is most important, but the occupation of the mother that is most significant in the world" (232).

In 1860, Elizabeth Cady Stanton spoke as the voice of the divine Female Poet of Heaven, to those on earth. As Montagu reports the speech:

"In marriage," she confirms both sexes' opportunity to worship the divine female sovereign as, "the mother of the race, to whom belongs the scepter and the crown. Her life is one long sacrifice for man. You tell us that among womankind there is no Moses, Christ, or Paul—no Shakespeare? Behold those mighty minds which are *our* great works! Into you, O sons of earth, goes all of us that is immortal. You center our very life, our hopes, our intensest love. For you, we gladly pour out our heart's blood

and die, knowing that from our suffering comes forth a new and more glorious resurrection of thought and life.” (qtd. in Montagu 226)¹⁶⁷

Here, Stanton insists that the world is transfigured through the cooperation of both sexes with the right understanding, right words, and right actions toward the feminine spirit.

For our world, Shakespeare’s message of love applies in the doubled mythopoetic figure of “global warming.” Like Eliot, and Blake before him, Alchemist Harpur suggests, “without the Holy Grail’s restorative waters of imagination, the world is a Waste Land, and the apocalypse is now” (284). In other words, the pollution and desecration of the cosmos reflects poisonous patriarchal capitalism, and rational materialism of our time, as the *Midsummer* draughts and floods do. Harpur suggests: “If we wish to reinstate the Soul of the World in her original glory, we will have to do more than introduce environmental remedies. We have to cultivate a new perspective, and a sense of metaphor, a seeing double” (285).¹⁶⁸ And the lesson from the warrior queens and the warrior heroes engaged with them, is that neither sex ought to try to disempower, or hold the other hostage, but should work to identify and support the divine complements in the Other, until love dissolves them into harmony. So, the battle between Shakespeare’s male and female warrior rulers asks us to reexamine gender roles.

Thus, Shakespeare’s warrior queens encourage us to reimagine our stories from the Old Testament masculine fury and passion, as the Word of the Law, to more closely reflect the New Testament feminine passion of His Son, the Word of Love. And so, in the humorous oxymorons of the yawning, married Amazon, Hippolyta, impatient for the moon to change to get to bed with Theseus; and Cleopatra, joking about sex and dying to

¹⁶⁷ Stanton addressed the tenth National Women’s Rights Convention, at the Cooper Institute in New York, May 10, 1860.

¹⁶⁸ See also Homan 102.

get back into bed with Antony, as his wife—Shakespeare might offer a bawdy and prophetic wink. In these literary characters of the marble-constant and ever-changing creator, as Female, Shakespeare's eternal endings dream that all people might say "yes", and become ourselves as earthly brides and bridegrooms in the wider universal, and eternal service of Mother Nature.

Shakespeare clears Antony from the action, so that the Great Queen can "boy" Caesar's greatness by championing Antony, and thereby show herself as the highest authority who makes or breaks the heroes in the final story. And so, Cleopatra spends most of Act 5 dressing and polishing her lines for her performance as the supreme goddess of Nature. And, like Hippolyta's mystical frame-narrative, the audience of *Midsummer* must decide to amend reason, and agree to suspend disbelief, or simply discard the whole idea of original female energy as a preposterous dream. However, it is important to note, that even as Puck suggests the latter, he also suggests they all conjoin, or "take hands", and "restore amends", "if we be friends." It seems that if there is ever any time to identify a Shakespearean wink, it is here, in this mystical marriage between the supernatural and the mortal, in Cleopatra's mystical marriage with Antony, and in Hippolyta's midsummer night's dream come true.

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